

THE FRESCOES IN THE VILLA OF THE MYSTERIES, POMPEII

By

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the dissertation submitted for the Magister Artium (Latin) to the University of Johannesburg, apart from the help recognised, is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another university or institution of higher education for a Degree.



ABSTRACT

Of the many paintings in Pompeii, the frescoes in the Villa of the Mysteries are an example of the most beautiful and the most intriguing. These fascinating images have become the focus of much scholarly research and consequent debate that has continued since Amedeo Maiuri (Chief Archaeologist of Pompeii in the 1920's and overseer of the excavation of the Villa of the Mysteries) published his belief that the paintings represented the initiation of a young woman into the cult of Dionysus.

The paintings were executed during the first half of the first century BCE at a time when many different mystery cults were popular. Some rituals even overlapped, having elements of more than one cult. This has resulted in a variety of interpretations as to the god (or gods) represented and the overall meaning of the paintings by numerous scholars, based on a plethora of reasons.

In the attempt to investigate and compare these differing opinions and the information used to form them, this dissertation concludes that Maiuri's theory is the most plausible. However, the order in which the scenes should be read is questioned, and a new order of reading these scenes is suggested. If the onlooker separates the scenes using the direction of the gazes of the characters instead of using the painted columns to divide them, two worlds become apparent: one human and one mythological. The paintings then appear to represent the initiation of a young woman in to the cult of Dionysus in the human sphere, which is being simultaneously overseen by mythological characters in the spiritual world.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Reading the frescoes in the Villa of the Mysteries

The excavations that began in Pompeii in the 18th century revealed an ancient town that had been buried beneath lava by the famous volcanic eruption in 79 CE. Never before had a historical moment unfolded in such a spectacular fashion. It appeared as if frozen in time. The ruins that archaeologists uncovered gave onlookers the opportunity to see life exactly as it was almost 1700 years earlier (De La Croix *et al.*1991:202).

Many houses had paintings on the walls. One house, initially excavated in 1910 and situated on the outskirts of the city, is of particular interest (Snow-Smith 2005:106). The walls of one of its rooms display a series of frescoes, the meaning of which has been hotly debated by academics since its discovery. The house was named 'The Villa of Mysteries' because it was assumed that the scenes represented an initiation into a mystery cult.¹ The most popular interpretation is the cult of Dionysus.² This has, however, been challenged. The dating of the artworks to around 50 BCE is widely accepted (Honour & Fleming 1995:156), but the function of the room itself is not clear. The exact order in which the paintings should be read, as well as the identification of the characters and objects are much disputed in the secondary literature - see the collection of essays, floor plan and layout in Gazda (2000) and illustrations in Jackson (no date).

All of the adult human figures in the frescoes are female. There are, however, some male mythological characters (Brendel 1980:121). All interpretations agree that there are no human adult male figures present in the scenes, which appear to express some kind of

¹ The mystery cults began to flourish during the Hellenistic period. The reason for this was that many people were turning away from the Olympic pantheon and searching for gods that would give more satisfying religious experiences. Unlike the official religions, which were more public, mystery cults emphasized private worship within closed groups. Personal salvation was becoming important to an increasing number of people (Meyer 1987:4).

² Representations of the god Dionysus were popular in Pompeii, possibly due to the fact that the city owed much of its wealth to the wine trade. Bacchus, son of Zeus and Semele, was often depicted together with satyrs, musicians, bacchanals, grapes, winged youths, cupids or nudes. These figures were part of amorous, erotic or fantastic scenes (Grant 1979:111-113).

female activity, initiation or ritual. The scene marked A in the diagram in Addendum 2 (Gazda 2000a:3) depicts a child reading a text. There are three other women in the same group: one standing, one seated and holding a scroll, and one walking away from them holding a platter. Scene B shows a woman seated with her back to the viewer, attended by two other women. She is lifting a cloth on a table while one attendant pours liquid from a small jug onto a plate. Next to them is an old naked satyr playing a lyre. Scene C consists of three people: One is a woman standing with a shawl thrown in mid-air above her head. Her left hand is raised in an agitated gesture. Seated next to her is a woman with pointed ears suckling one of two goats. A person playing pipes is watching from behind.

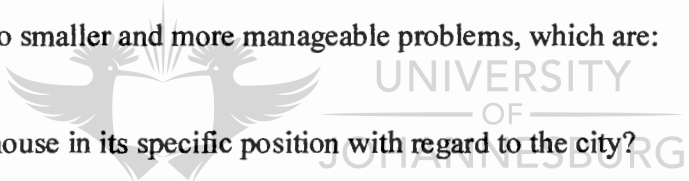
Scene D is depicted on the adjacent wall. A seated old satyr is holding up a bowl from which he is possibly drinking (Maiuri 1961:102). A younger male figure is looking into the bowl. Directly behind this is a standing male figure holding an ugly theatrical mask. To the right of them is a man wearing a laurel wreath lying sprawled across a chair with his head in the lap of a woman (the head of this figure is missing from the painting). A staff with some foliage is resting against the man's chair. Scene E shows a kneeling woman without with outstretched hands hovering above a large pointed object that is covered with a cloth; to the right a standing winged figure holds up her hand towards this object while she brandishes a stick held high and looks away. Behind them is a standing woman (head also missing).

The third wall displays Scene F. One semi-naked woman is lying with open eyes in a dejected and/or expectant pose across the lap of another seated woman. One hand of the seated woman is resting on her head; the other hand is holding her hair in a comforting manner. To their right a woman is holding a long stick with some green leaf-like shapes on its end above them whilst a fourth woman appears to be dancing naked beside them and clapping cymbals in her hands above her head. Scene G depicts a small winged figure holding a small object with the picture of a head and arm on it; this he holds up to be viewed by a woman standing beside a seated woman. The standing woman is looking at this object whilst attending to the seated woman's hair. A small winged boy in Scene H

rests its his head on its his hand and looks nonchalantly upward with crossed legs. Scene I shows a woman sitting pensively looking to her right. She is wearing a ring on the third finger of her left hand and a bracelet on her left wrist.

The value of the study may be to increase our knowledge of (a) the mystery cults practiced around the turn of the first century BCE, (b) the function of rites of passage practiced in Roman society, (c) the expression of social identity given by the Roman house, (d) the positioning, choice, form and function of frescoes chosen to adorn walls in Roman houses, (e) possible connections between these frescoes and literary texts, (f) the way in which these frescoes may be an expression of the human subconscious, and (g) the function of these frescoes and whether the room was intended to be a domestic female space.

The basic question explored in this study is: What is the meaning of these frescoes painted on the walls of the Villa of the Mysteries? To treat this problem satisfactorily, it can be separated into smaller and more manageable problems, which are:

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- (a) Why is the house in its specific position with regard to the city?
 - (b) What function did the room, in which the frescoes are found, fulfil?
 - (c) Who commissioned and who painted these frescoes?
 - (d) When were they painted? What was their origin?
 - (e) How should the individual scenes be identified?
 - (f) How are the scenes separated? In which order should they be read?
 - (g) Who do the characters / persons in the scenes refer to?
 - (h) What do the objects in the frescoes refer to?
 - (i) What do the events in the frescoes refer to?
 - (j) How do the characters, objects, events and scenes relate to one another?
 - (k) What is the overall function of the frescoes in this space? Are they purely for decoration? Expression of the female subconscious? Religious inspiration or initiation? Propaganda? Fashion? Entertainment? Or are they designed to display wealth?

- (l) How do these frescoes relate to literary texts?
- (m) How do they compare with paintings in other houses in Pompeii?

Methodology

I have chosen visual semiotics as the most appropriate method of analysis, as expounded by Eco (1976) and Barthes (1977). Semiotics is the methodology that researches all systems of signs. It therefore provides a valid framework of analysis for the frescoes in the Villa of the Mysteries.

Three sub-disciplines of semiotics have been developed to give an account of signs in general: Syntactics; Semantics (Structural Analysis) and Pragmatics. Syntactics studies the relation of signs to each other in formal structures. It focuses on the rules of combination and how the signs are put together. The interrelation of signs is studied without regard to meaning. In this study the relationship of the pictures, the elements within the pictures and how they are combined into larger units and scenes will be analyzed according to the rules of syntactics. This accounts for the intratextual context of the murals. Elsner (1995, 1998 & 2007) carried out extensive research into the codes regulating the production of Roman art in general.

Semantics focuses on the relationship between signs, or clusters of signs, and the things that they refer to. Semantics asks questions like: 'What does it stand for?' and 'What is the reference of the symbols?' The meaning of the individual elements depicted in the frescoes will be analyzed in their socio-historical context using semantics. To disambiguate signs, the contexts in which they appear have to be taken into account. In researching the intertextual context, similar objects and scenes in other frescoes, paintings, mosaics or literary texts would be taken into account. Clarke (1991) is a useful source reference for the architectural structure, layout of rooms and decoration style. Much information on mural painting in Pompeii and the frescoes in the Villa of the Mysteries was taken from De La Croix *et al* (1991), Honour & Fleming (1995) and Amery & Curran (2002). Hales (2003) did informative work on the social context of

murals in general. Information on marriage, women and the family in ancient Rome is provided by Carcopino (1991).

Pragmatics specifies the relationship of the signs to the onlooker. It attempts to understand and explain the impact of the signs on those who use them. To account for the pragmatic aspect, I will investigate: who would have commissioned or created the artworks; why were they created and for what purpose; what messages were they intended to convey; what message was most likely to have been understood by the viewer and what relationship would there have been between the sender and the receiver of the message. This would account for the extratextual context of the frescoes. Meyer (1987), Burkert (1987) and Klauck (2000) supply us with a good background on the mystery cults. More detailed descriptions of the names of characters and mythological interpretations are provided by Spencer, Robinson & Wilson (1962), Ogilvie (1969), Room (1983), Goring (1991), Larson (2001), Price & Kearns (2003) and Encyclopaedia Britannica Online (2010). Barthes (1977) provides the background to the understanding of the semiology of images.

Review of literature



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Authors have reached a variety of conclusions as to the meaning of the frescoes. Mauiri (1955:93) suggested that the mistress of the house was a priestess in the cult of Dionysus and that the paintings are a representation of the initiation of brides into the Dionysiac mysteries. Meyer (1987:64) agrees with Maiuri with regard to the god depicted and states that the frescoes illustrate the ceremony of initiation to the cult of Dionysus.³ Many foreign gods were integrated into the Roman national pantheon, and as a result there was a variety of ancient mystery cults being practiced in Pompeii at the time that the murals were painted.⁴ By studying aspects of ceremonies and beliefs practiced by worshippers of

³ Bacchus, also known to the Romans as Dionysus or Liber, had many facets. He presided over wine, revelry, ecstasy, madness, sexuality and fertility. Even though there is much emphasis on satyrs, maenads and the phallus, it does not necessarily mean that the rituals were of an orgiastic nature (Hammer 2000:46).

⁴ Many participants joined the mystery cults for reasons other than personal salvation or religious fulfilment. Some were simply lonely, bored or alienated and wished to form close-knit relationships with members of the cult. Others

these cults, Turcan (2007:309) agrees with Maiuri and Meyer that Dionysus most probably the main character in the whole ensemble.

Grant (1979:144-146) believes that only the initiated would be party to the esoteric rites which would be performed in sacred places, therefore concludes that the frescoes depict a mimed satire with unmasked actors narrating parts of the legend of Dionysus. Snow-Smith (Snow-Smith 2005:107) agrees with Grant and uses the paintings in the Tomb of the Leopards⁵ to argue that the scenes would more likely have reflected the *drômena*⁶ of the initiation process (which was acted much in the same way as a Christian nativity play), because the actual initiation would have been secret and not revealed publicly. It would therefore supply the visual background for a real initiation of a woman into the cult of Dionysus taking place in this room. The view that the frescoes depict the process of initiation into the mysteries of Dionysus is also shared by Seaford (2009:1) whose article compares the ritual in the paintings to tribal initiation and its position in the social and religious life of the community.

According to Benvenuto (1994:xvii-xviii) the frescoes, interpreted as a Dionysiac initiation ritual, express the eternal antithesis between profane (erotic) and sacred love.⁷ She brings to light the opposing feelings that cause perpetual struggle in the human psyche. On another level, she also relates these scenes to the portrayal of unveiling and revelation with the psychoanalytical practice of encounters with demons and lost paradises.

Gazda (2000b:1) is of the opinion that the room in the Villa of the Mysteries was most likely used to entertain guests and for special occasions. Her research shows that much of the imagery in the frescoes reflects daily life. She rejects the idea that the scenes were used in some sort of cult ceremony or were to portray images from a Bacchic cult, as

joined because of their egalitarian beliefs. In the cult arena rich and poor, free and slave were equal in spirit. There were some who joined to take part in the fascinating and delightful occasions (Meyer 1987:9).

⁵ The Tomb of the Leopards is a mural found in the town of Tarquinia in Etruria and dates from around 500 BCE.

⁶ The *drômena* refer to the mythic dramas performed during the Bacchic ceremony of initiation.

⁷ It can also be called the struggle between *erôs* and *agapê*.

there is a paucity of supporting evidence. The notion that the room was used for entertainment is shared by Hales (2003:146) who refers to the paintings as a *Dionysiac megalography*.⁸ She explains that the world of the Pompeiian frescoes was one of *exotic fantasy* into which a home owner could invite visitors and in so doing deliberately challenge the austere Roman view of the nature of things. The effect would be to encourage guests to relax and have a good time.

Leach (2004:90) believes that the paintings represent some kind of ritual, but is not specific as to which particular one is being enacted. Her focus is on interpreting Roman painting in domestic spaces to demonstrate the political power of the owner of the house. Leach draws a parallel between the public and private lives of upper class Romans and how this parallel was reflected in mural decoration.

Longfellow (Gazda 2000a:33) investigates the positioning of the decorated room in the Villa of the Mysteries as gendered space. She favours the belief that the frescoes were probably painted in a dining room and would therefore have been attended by both men and women. De Carolis (2001:14) explains that the meaning of the paintings is still being heavily debated. He offers four possibilities of interpretation; 1) the initiation rite of a bride into the Bacchic cult; 2) a representation of the faith of the owner/s of the villa; 3) a reference to the cult of Dionysus himself or 4) as a theatrical representation. His work investigates the ways in which different types of rooms were decorated in relation to the function and purpose of the room. The author concludes that public rooms were more sparsely decorated and that private rooms were more elaborately embellished. As the frescoes are large, vibrant and elaborate, this could lead to the belief that the frescoes were painted on the walls of a private room. But as the paintings represent Dionysus, the author also adds that it was common for pictorial representations of the god to be placed in dining rooms, which are more public. So this room could be either public or private.

⁸ A *megalography* is a representation depicting monumental figures within an architecturally defined space. (De Carolis 2001:15).

A different interpretation is that the frescoes represent bridal initiation and that the scenes depict a young girl being prepared for marriage. Elsner (2007:88) agrees this view as a base (although he does state that it is not wholly certain) and illustrates that the painting has a specific thematic alignment with the poems of Catullus, who was writing in Rome at exactly the same time that the frescoes were being painted.

Although Kirk (2000:98) believes that some kind of ritual is depicted in the frescoes, she agrees with Elsner that the imagery is associated with marriage. The author compares the scenes with those occurring on red-figure vases produced in Southern Italian workshops from late 5th century BCE. The nuptial theme, according to Kirk, followed a long iconographic tradition.

Wilburn (2000:57) counters the notion that the god depicted in the paintings is Dionysus. He bases his study on a closer look at how the onlookers in ancient Italy would have perceived this portrayed divinity in his local cultural context. The author believes that it would have been more probable that viewers would have related this god to an Italo-Campanian one. The most likely candidate would have been Liber, due to his association with abundance, fertility and sexuality.⁹ Longfellow (2000a:116-128) agrees with Wilburn that the god portrayed is not Dionysus, but Liber. She believes that in these paintings his head is in the lap of the goddess Venus.

Brendel (1980:120) concludes that the represented actions in the paintings must be attributed to a cult only accessible to women. He feels that there is not enough evidence to confirm the exact cult that is demonstrated, but perceives a possible connection with the cult in the Roman temple of Ceres. He is certain, however, that it has little to do with Bacchic rites and ideas. Varone (2001:96-97) explains that the paintings are difficult to

⁹ The mystery religions mostly had their roots in nature and fertility. They had been practised for a long time, some even dating back to prehistory. This ancient heritage placed the goddess in the prominent position as nurturer and protector. She was the divine Mother and often ruled alone. She sometimes shared her throne with a god. Fertility on Earth was then depicted as a sacred marriage (Meyer 1987:6).

interpret but he believes that they are probably depict a female fertility rite, a marriage initiation or another kind of female ritual.

Layout

In order to address the problems stated above this dissertation has been divided into chapters:

Chapter one: Introduction (problem statement, method, review of literature, lay-out of chapters).

Chapter two: Setting the scene (background, painting style, date of execution, identity of artist or artists, patron and general style of forms).

Chapter three: Pragmatic Analysis (general lay-out of houses; reconstruction of socio-historical context, function and female space).

Chapter four: Structural Analysis: syntactics and semantics (identification of scenes, elements and forms, reference of objects, relationship to each other, characters and events, realm, interpretation of scenes).

Chapter five: Conclusion

Bibliography



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CHAPTER TWO: SETTING THE SCENE

Background and general style of the frescoes

This chapter will attempt to answer the following questions: When were the frescoes created? Who painted them? Who ordered them? And was the style original or copied from an earlier prototype?

These questions are difficult enough to answer when there is a plethora of information available regarding the history of the artist, patron, the socio-historical context, painting techniques, documents and other records surrounding a work of art, but these frescoes were hidden beneath a mass of debris and ash following a volcanic eruption for hundreds of years until they were unearthed by archaeologists. It was not known who painted them, or why they were painted. The name of the owner(s) of the house is lost to us, as are the names of those of the people who would have seen the paintings. Discovering their secrets is not an easy matter.

In order to assess the approximate date the frescoes were created, we need to look at the different styles of painting discovered in Pompeii.

Painting style

When Mount Vesuvius erupted in 79 CE, the debris and ash that fell on Pompeii covered up paintings that were not all from the same era. Four styles of painting have been classified in Pompeii based on the dates the artworks were created (Grant 1979:14-15). These four successive styles were created over a 300-year period (De La Croix *et al.* 1991:202). The earliest is referred to as the Incrustation Style, dated about 200-80 BCE. This style divides the wall into bright polychrome panels of solid colours, which are occasionally interspersed with textural contrasts to simulate the colours of marble and alabaster. The overall effect is a kind of stone wall that is painted and polished to look

like marble. This simple painting style does not have pictures (Amery & Curran 2002:123).



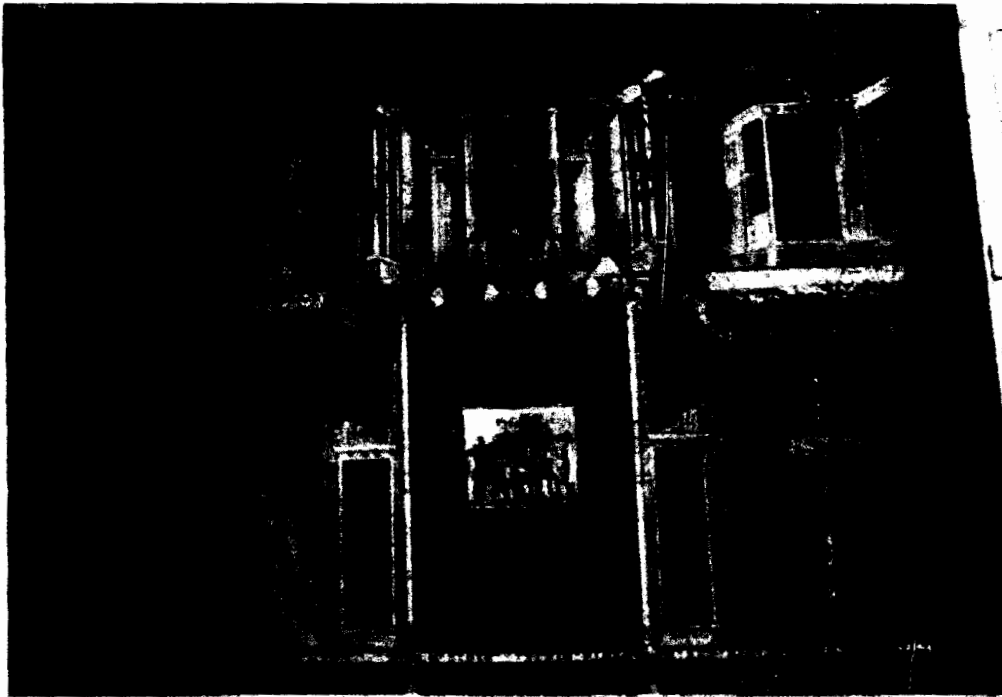
House of Sallust. First Style

The Second (or Architectural) Style (80-20 BCE) introduces paintings with architectural and scenic perspective. It portrays three-dimensional representations of streets, houses, stage settings and performances set against vividly coloured backgrounds. This style creates the illusion that the rooms were larger than they really were. The Second Style focuses on the middle zone of the wall. It mostly has borders top and bottom. Some paintings are separated by columns (Ellis 2002:16). This style is predominantly dramatic and theatrical.



Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor, Boscoreale. Second Style.

The Third Style (20 BCE-60 CE), also known as the Ornamental Style, moves away from depicting large spaces. The wall becomes a support for smaller framed scenes, giving the illusion of paintings hanging in a gallery with garlands, vines and candelabras as decoration in between. The walls appear more solid. Colours tend to be dark, even black. The pictures do not give the impression of being one whole frieze, as with the Second Style. The images are separate (Amery & Curran 2002:126).



House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto. Third Style.

The Fourth Style (or Intricate Style) appeared between the great earthquake in 62 CE and the volcanic eruption in 79 CE. It encompasses architectural patterns interspersed with figures and fantastic creatures, pastoral scenes and portraits of real persons. The overall effect is balanced and symmetric (De La Croix *et al.* 1991:210). The Fourth Style is more complicated and refined than the Third Style. There is a return to the layout of the Second Style where the emphasis is on the centre panel. The top and bottom panels are less dominant. The background colour tends to be uniform, unlike the Third Style which uses different colours for panels. This style allowed the painters to be more inventive (Amery & Curran 2002:127).



Domus Aurea of Nero. Fourth Style.

The frescoes in the Villa of the Mysteries depict large figures, painted in the middle zone of the wall, that appear to be in a stage type of setting against a backdrop of vivid red. It is, therefore, unanimously agreed that the paintings belong to the Second Style. De Carolis (2001:13-14) explains that these particular paintings do differ slightly from many other Second Style paintings that use columns, architraves, cornices and friezes to create effective perspective (the effect was to break through the actual wall to other landscapes beyond it). The paintings in the Villa of the Mysteries reduced the Second Style techniques to bare essentials. The painted wall is a background to the 29 monumental figures painted on it. They move freely within one defined space. There are no columns, architraves or other architectural depictions to disturb the scene.

‘Styles’ are a modern invention, according to Elsner (1995:63). These styles may assist us in understanding the periods in which the paintings were executed from a modern perspective, but they offer no insight into Roman ways of viewing. The author feels that the different styles could even hinder or confuse our interpretation of the frescoes. However, at this stage, it is helpful to place the paintings as belonging to the Second Style to assess the period when the paintings were created, which would be between 80 to

20 BCE. What is interesting to note is that when the eruption took place the frescoes were in the region of 120 years old. The age of the paintings makes it more difficult to find out anything about them. They were already ancient in 79 CE, so artifacts found on site and other information gathered at the time of the eruption are not necessarily relevant to the actual time that the paintings were created two or three generations earlier. All we can be sure of is the approximate date based on the painting style.

Who painted the frescoes?

The next question is who could have painted them? Was it an artist working in a studio? Was it a team of craftsmen? Or was it someone else? According to Grant (1979:99) there were no painters' workshops found in Pompeii. Painters worked on site at the houses. This has been confirmed by findings of partly decorated rooms that have been excavated from the ruins after the eruption. At least this applies to the first century CE, and we have to assume that it also was the norm in the first century BCE.

There were two groups of painters in the Roman world: *imaginarii* (painters of figures and pictures) and *parietarii* (painters of decorative elements of the frescoes). Assistant painters worked under a master who liaised with his clients and did the main layout of the painting. All painters would have been freedmen or slaves, as the Roman upper classes did not work as artisans. The slaves were considered similar to the tools with which they painted and could easily be sold along with them! (Grant 1979:100).

Clarke (1991:45-6) gives some insight into the Second-Style painter. He would have collaborated with the architect, the mosaicist and the stuccoist (decorative wall plaster craftsman). He had to have an excellent understanding of perspective and also a repertory of still-life subjects. The artist also had to be skilled in producing light effects on these objects. He would have been a master craftsman. It was most likely that he had received his training in Alexandria or Athens. It was probable that he worked alone with helpers for some ornamental detail. The artist himself would have been responsible for the design of the painting (after consulting with the client) and would have created the preliminary

sketches and transferred them to the walls, possibly using grids to assist him to paint them on a larger scale.

There has been much debate on whether or not pattern books were used. Although it is easy to assume that ancient artists would work to books much like a book of wallpaper patterns today. Ellis (2002:8) does not agree. He feels that it was more likely that ancient artists had a store of stock designs that they would show to clients. These stock pictures of gods and motifs were easily altered to represent any god or other personality chosen by the patron. However, the production of highly cultivated pieces was usually entirely attributed to the artist.

Wallace-Hadrill (1994:31) explains that colours fall into some sort of rank order. Pigment was valued in proportion to its cost and availability. Red Cinnabar was fairly expensive and could be excluded from the decorator's contract and charged directly to the client. Plain white was the cheapest. Yellow ochre and red were the norm for the backgrounds of better rooms. Blue was applied to the choicest rooms, due to its rarity and high cost. Black was chosen for especially grand rooms. The simple fact that a whole room was painted in an expensive colour would show a visitor that this was a very important room and should not be entered without the owner's permission (Ellis 2002:139).

It is of interest to note that art in Pompeii is not typical of art in Rome during the same period, because it was not a major city. It was a coastal town filled with seamen, traders and holiday makers. Much in the same way that a holiday home today is often decorated in a more casual style than a permanent home, it is quite common for a family to own an upmarket, formally decorated home in town and a holiday residence filled with bric-à-brac and inexpensive art. For this reason it was rare for paintings in Pompeii to equal the technical accomplishment of art in Rome and relatively few rise above what Honour & Fleming (1995:156) refer to as "rapidly daubed hackwork." The painting of the frescoes in the Villa of the Mysteries is an exception and its excellence is not typical of art in Pompeii. These magnificent paintings are in a superior class all of their own.

Honour & Fleming (1995:156) inform us that there has been much discussion as to the authorship of the frescoes. Were the scenes copied from an earlier prototype? No exact scene that could have been copied has been found, but the style of the figures does resemble that of Hellenistic sculpture dated over 200 years earlier. The faces are beautiful, with gazes that almost seem unaware of the onlooker, obsessed with their own agendas. Some even appear to withhold information in a secret way. They look mysterious. The characters often stand on one leg in semi-relaxed poses, typical of Hellenistic sculpture. Many of the hand gestures are defensive. Above all the poses are very lifelike and natural. The frieze appears to be carefully designed to fit the architectural space using these traditional classical forms. Many early Pompeian painters used Hellenistic models for themes; therefore myths and legends were frequently depicted. Elements from oriental cults were intertwined with these classical scenes, as were stories from epic poems. This gave birth to eclectic scenes of gods on adventurous journeys, taking part in sporting activities or engaged in erotic pursuits (Grant 1979:106).

Conclusion



The paintings in the Villa of the Mysteries belong to the Second Pompeian Style and were executed around 50 BCE. The master painter and his team would not have been Roman citizens. The artists would have been freedmen or slaves trained to create a repertoire of stock motifs, characters and scenes. These paintings were based on the classical poses of Hellenistic sculpture. The whole of the work would have been carried out on site, not in a separate studio. The patron must have been wealthy to afford an entire room with a background that was completely red, as it used a very costly pigment. He also must have paid the artist well as an excellent master craftsman, who used his superior skill to design the superior painted scenes to exactly fit the architectural space.

CHAPTER THREE: PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS

Scope

The meaning of the frescoes in the Villa of the Mysteries cannot be assessed without taking into consideration the house itself and asking the following questions: Who was the owner? Who were his visitors? Where was the house situated? How was it laid out? What was the socio-historical context? And was anything found in the house that may give a clue as to the purpose of the room? In this dissertation the floor plan compiled by Gazda (2000:2) – (see Addendum 1) will be used to identify the positioning of the rooms in the Villa and the layout of the individual scenes will be followed as illustrated by Gazda (2000:3) – (see Addendum 2).

General layout

Two important ancient authors have given us information on the ideal Roman house: Vitruvius (*floruit* 10 BCE) and Pliny the Younger (*floruit* 113 CE). Vitruvius in Book 6 of his work *On Architecture* lays out his principles on which a house should be planned. He advocated that the perfect room should be twice as long as is wide (Clarke 1991:13).

Although his work does not cover all types of Roman housing (it focuses on housing for the upper classes), his principles do give a modern reader a good understanding of an ancient Roman villa. Vitruvius gives us a broad description of a Roman house in general, whereas Pliny (5.6) refers to his own villas in his letters and elaborates on the view, flowers, décor and general ambience. Pliny's account of a villa is more personal. It is not a simple matter to reconstruct a building from literary sources, but both authors do agree that a Roman aristocrat would have certain expectations regarding an ideal villa: that it should have a wonderful view; that it should show an acceptable balance between function and a display of wealth; that it should not be more opulent than the owner's social position required and that it would have reception rooms appropriate to receive high-status guests. A house was designed for both business and pleasure. Furthermore, a

town house would be a centre for commerce and politics, whereas a country house would function as a business centre and also a farm.¹⁰ Many scholars have attempted to associate different parts of the house with different purposes, but it is more likely that there was a time for business in a house and a time for pleasure. (Ellis 2002:14-16). Vitruvius distinguishes between different areas of a house into which a visitor could enter uninvited, for example the *atria*, *tablina*, and *vestibula* (the author refers to these as 'common' rooms), and areas which required an invitation (*cubicula*, *triclinia*, and *balnea*). The ancient author points out in book 6¹¹ that persons of middling condition in life have no need to use the private areas, as they are seeking favours from persons of higher rank.

A Roman house would be entered through an entryway called the *fauces* (meaning jaws). This long passage led to a large open reception space called the *atrium*. There was an opening in the roof of this area, the *compluvium*, which was positioned directly above the *impluvium*, a basin area to collect rain water. Visitors were received in the adjoining *tablinum* or *tabulinum*. The pater familias would be most likely to stand or be seated in the *atrium* in line with the *fauces* on the far side of the *impluvium*, as here he would create a majestic impression to the guest, whose gaze was cleverly directed to the owner of the house by a sequence of architecturally framed planes against a backdrop of an enticing glimpse of the garden beyond. From this dominant position the master of the home appeared to control the boundaries of his house (Clark 1991:5-6).

Guests would first be met in the *atrium*. Rooms adjoining the atrium were traditionally the *tablinum*, *alae* and *fauces* (Leach 2004:20-22). The house, if laid out according to Vitruvius' acceptable rules, would be sure to impress the spectator with a balance between convenience and beauty. Entering the house would be a kind of show.

¹⁰ According to Nappo (2000:152) the villa was a large construction built outside the city walls. Therefore we can assume that the Villa of the Mysteries was a country house

¹¹ Vitruvius 6.5.1: *Igitur is, qui communi sunt fortuna, non necessaria magnifica vestibula nec tabulina neque atria, quod in aliis officia praestand ambiundo neque ab aliis ambiuntur.*

Much activity took place in the *atrium*. Ancestral portrait masks and household gods were familiar sights. There was often a loom for spinning and weaving to show guests that the matron of the home worked with wool and was therefore of exemplary character, a credit to her husband (Leach 2004:26). These domestic activities gave an impression to visitors of the honourable life led by the owner and added to his prestige. As this area of the house was so busy, it is hardly surprising that the rear of the home developed for quieter activities. Clarke (1991:12) informs us that this back area became the new centre for private rituals during the second century BCE. He continues to explain that the *atrium* and *tablinum* were areas to receive uninvited guests, whereas the dining rooms, baths and bedrooms were reserved for invited guests.

The *tablinum* led off the *atrium* and housed the family records and deeds. This room was used to reckon accounts. It was usually more elaborately decorated than the *atrium* and was sometimes used as a summer dining room (Leach 2004:27-28).

The *tablinum* had traditionally doubled as a dining room, but also around the second century BCE the *triclinium* became popular. This was a room for Greek-style dining with three couches in a U-shape.

Ellis (2002: 166-167) investigates the notion that the Roman house was sectioned into 'rural' and 'urban' areas, meaning that highly-decorated sections were the domain of the aristocrat and poorer rooms were the domain of the servants. Ellis finds that this theory is not sound as there were servants in many areas of the house. For example, some servants slept in rooms adjoining their master's. Tutors were likely to occupy rooms next to children of the house, and the central *atrium* area would be used by both aristocrat and servant alike, making encounters a common occurrence.

Socio-historical context

It is important to note that a Roman house was not private as a house in the modern sense would be. It was not a sanctuary into which the owner could retreat from public gaze. The owner's social, political and business activities took place in the home and it was open to

both invited and uninvited visitors. A Roman citizen could spend a huge amount of money on building and decorating a house that would present him to the public in the best possible light (Wallace-Hadrill 1994:4-5). According to Leach (2004: 19) Roman aristocrats and political figures used their homes as an extension of their public offices. There were no boundaries between private and business life. As both chief legal office and social salon, the house played an important role in advancing the owner's prestige. Hales (2003:1) refers to the Roman's house as his *forum*. A Roman did not stand alone. He was judged in the light of his family and the functions of his home were interlinked with his public role. Entertaining guests who called was an important part of this joined business and private life and could be quite a grandiose affair (and also costly), as it was common for the upper classes to travel with a large entourage (Wallace-Hadrill 1994:5).

Function

Ellis (2002:107) explains that traditionally Roman villas were assumed to have had little economic function and that they were simply built for the pleasure of the rich, but the author argues that, as many shovels, tools, wine presses and other artefacts have been found in houses excavated in Pompeii, many rooms were dedicated to economic pursuits. Gardens were also used for commercial, or cottage, production of vines, vegetables, flowers or statues. Lesser aristocrats used their houses for both business and commercial enterprise. It seems that, even though owners may have had a lack of cash, they would still attempt to create as rich and traditional a reception room as they could afford (Ellis 2002:108).

Rituals were very common events in a Roman home. Daily life was filled with rituals in both the public and private spheres. Roman architecture was therefore a shaped space around them. The worship of household gods, birth, death, marriage, accepting visitors and having dinner parties, all followed a ritual. Great care was taken to ensure that houses were laid out and decorated appropriately to fit their assigned activity. Size, shape, location and decoration of each space formed codes directing the behaviour of each person in the house, whether inhabitant or visitor (Clarke 1991:1-2). Many rituals

took place in and around the home, thereby demonstrating to the household and the outside world that the family was living according to Roman tradition. These rituals were the basis of Roman society and were part of being Roman (Hales 2003:3). The particular god chosen was not a major issue. Elsner (1998:206) explains that ancient religion was a general appeasement of the god of the person's choice with rituals, pilgrimages and dedications without paying particular attention to what the higher powers of these gods were, or how they should be understood. The fact that religious rituals were seen to be performed regularly was the important factor.

It is not easy to form a distinct relationship between the function of the room and the style or subject of decoration, but there are some general observations. Passages, peristyles and atriums were often characterized by schematic, repetitive, patterned decoration. In private rooms, it was more common for fashion to prevail. These rooms would be the most likely to display the taste of the patron as they are often brightly coloured with imaginative and fantastic scenes. Décor in public rooms, on the other hand, was more simple and conservative.

According to Ellis (2002:140-141) there was a relationship between the theme in which the room was painted and its function. For example: reception rooms tended to have heroic or major mythological themes; bedrooms had more intimate scenes and baths had pictures of waterside scenes or myths. Some rooms did, however, have several functions so this method of linking theme and function is not wholly conclusive. In fact, this idea can even be misleading. Although the frieze in the Villa of the Mysteries depicts life-sized scenes of some form of ritual that appears to be one of the mystery cults, it is not sufficient to prove that actual rituals took place in the room. Mythological scenes could have various interpretations: the everyday, the ritual and the symbolic. It is quite possible that modern viewers see more symbolic associations than ancient viewers, patrons or artists would have intended.

Many homes that were destroyed in 79 CE had paintings dated to the first and second centuries BCE, as they followed the first and second Pompeian painting styles. Paintings

were lovingly preserved and restored as they represented the antiquity of the family to their guests. De Carolis (2001:5-6) informs us that Dionysiac compositions were common in dining rooms destined for banquets.

Ellis (2002:141) suggests that an alternative way of looking at the ancient art is to consider what it tells us about the Romans' conception of domestic life. Hunting scenes can be taken as an interest in the owner's interest in country pursuits on his estate. Landscape scenes can represent the ideal setting in which a house should be located. There was also an element of the exotic in many landscapes. There was a fashion for pictures of the Nile River, pygmies and hippos. This did not represent real life, but rather the intellectual and political credentials of the owner. Water represented wealth and status, which was of the utmost importance to Roman citizens. They would be careful to display abundance in the decoration of their homes in any possible way.

Maiuri (1955:14) explains that decoration of Roman houses followed fashion trends. He noted that the smaller the rooms, the more decorated they were, even to the extent of being coarse. De Carolis (2001:5-6) agrees with Maiuri that in the Roman world painting walls was a widespread fashion. Most walls except those meant to house servants could be decorated. This could mean simply whitewashing, displaying a few motifs or creating large frescoes.

Ellis (2002:9) believes that the décor in a Roman house represents the expression of an individual, but one that is heavily constrained by the conventions of society and the local community. This is not only due to conservative conventions, but financial restraints. Innovation was potentially expensive, due to the fact that hiring leading artists or using new materials in untried structures could be costly. Hales (2003:3-5), unlike Ellis, argues that décor was not simply personal taste. It also reflected a homeowner's right to be a part of Rome. The art was to create an impression on visitors. The house was a symbol of *Romanitas* and would immediately spark recognition in the ancient viewer. The impression would be that the Pompeian was a true Roman.

Hales (2003:162) explains that the decoration and layout of a Roman house became a cosmological symbol with various parts of the house representing various parts of the universe. Wall painting was an important part of this representation. By painting mystical and exotic fantasies on his walls a Roman could express his desire to explore foreign worlds and exert control over them and at the same time show his control over his household and therefore demonstrate his suitability for public office.

One fashion trend, according to (Clarke 1991:47), was to provide work for painters of theatrical backdrops executing these Second Style paintings. They created a kind of stage setting for the house owner to entertain his guests. The illusion followed a pattern. For tragedy, typical decorative motifs of an impressive royal palace with statues, columns, and elaborate entablatures were painted; for comedy, views of private houses; for satiric drama, landscape scenes with trees and grottoes. De Carolis (2001:13) added that it was also popular to decorate certain rooms with paintings derived from theatre backdrops which corresponded to the three genres of tragedy, comedy, and satiric drama.

Elsner (1995:74-75) emphasizes that the function of decoration in a Roman house was not based on only illusion, but also allusion. What the allusion signified was that fantasy was more important than reality. Illusion would suggest that the pictures offer an imitation of the world that is reflected; allusion, on the other hand, would offer a world that was denied to the viewer. Elsner explains that illusion and allusion represent *the poles between which the viewer's desires must constantly be oscillating*.

Female space

With regard to female space, Wallace-Hadrill (1994:8-10) explains that, whereas in a Greek house male and female space is clearly defined, in a Roman house it is hardly detectable, as Roman men and women were not segregated in the domestic context. Some individual rooms were used in appropriate circumstances by women, but there were no whole areas exclusively set aside for female activity, as none appear to be set aside for the sole use of children.

Longfellow (2000:32-33) states that, although depictions of women dominate the frescoes, there is no other evidence for the frescoes being reserved for one gender or the other. She warns that without secondary evidence, it cannot be proven that the room was exclusively female space. She supports this idea by stating that it would be inconsistent with Roman custom to reserve its most opulent room for women. It is probable that it was a space shared by both men and women, its usage possibly separated at different times of the day.

Although the room would not have been totally reserved for female activities, it was quite possible, according to Longfellow (2000:33), that the room was used for female gatherings, perhaps bridal preparations by female members of the household. But even if this were the case, marriage preparations would not have been frequent occurrences. It would have been more likely that the room was used to receive prestigious male and female visitors to dine and to be entertained with theatrical performance.

A Roman woman's life was centred mostly around the home. Her place was as *materfamilias* and as such she was charged with running the household and raising children. There was little opportunity for most women to gain social power or prestige outside marriage. Participating in the mystery cults did allow women to rise to an important position, even priestess, and because of this fact cult membership became very popular for the elite. The most popular were cults that provided assistance to women's rites of passage, especially childbirth and marriage. The gods that were worshipped were Ceres and Proserpina, Venus, Isis, Dionysus and Liber (Hammer 2000:39).

Seaford (no date) considers the frieze as a whole to represent a female initiation into one of the mystery cults. He asks whether the female initiate has intruded on the mysteries of the male *thiasos*, and has seen the terrifying Silenos (Silenos) mask, which even the satyr has only seen indirectly.

Description of the Villa of the Mysteries



Villa of the Mysteries

A small part of the Villa of the Mysteries was excavated in 1909-10 but the majority was completed in 1929-30 (Maiuri 1955:91). The house was originally built in the first half of the 2nd century BCE, but work continued on the house right up to the eruption in 79 CE (Grant 1979:142). At that time the house was more than 130 years old. The villa lies between two roads¹² on steeply sloping ground. It is positioned outside the walls of the town, at the end of a street lined with funerary buildings. It was built on the lines of a simple town house, but was slowly renovated and more rooms were added until it was in the form that we see today (Maiuri 1955:93). Nappo (2000:152) agrees with Maiuri and explains that the house originally a *not so attractive townhouse*, but that it did occupy a good position. It was extended in around 50 BCE, when an extra storey was added. It was at this time that the splendid frescoes were painted.

There is little known about the home owner(s). Grant (1979:142) suggested that the Villa had probably been owned by the Istacidii family of the ancient Pompeiian nobility. Leach (2004:90) agrees with Grant that it was intended as a luxury villa for a prosperous family and that it was plausible that the family were the local Istacidii. The family land was

¹² One was the main road from the Herculaneum Gate to Oplonits and the other was Via Superior (Nappo 2000:152).

used almost exclusively for the production of wine. This interpretation is based on the fact that two of the rooms of the house had wine presses when it was excavated. Leach (2004:90) believes that the family had fallen on hard times, forcing the house to be used for agricultural production.¹³ As Sabellan notables, the Istacidii would have found themselves outside public life just after Roman colonization. In the Augustan period one family member, N. Istacidius Cilix, advanced to duovirate and donated a 'seating wedge' in the amphitheatre. He has been connected to Istacidia Ruffilla, priestess of Livia-Ceres, whose image was found in the house. Leach argues that it is possible that the family's return to political consequence was due to a massive campaign of Julio-Claudian cultivation. The house appears to have been in an unaltered state of decoration that may have been caused by continual family ownership. There was also sculpture preserved from the Augustan period found in the house when it was excavated. These Julio-Claudian statues have influenced its interpretation. It is important to note that the paintings were created during the time of Julius Caesar. The cult of Livia-Ceres was only practiced after the death of Augustus, who ruled Rome many years later, so the paintings could not have been meant to represent the later cult at the time they were painted. They could, however, have been 'adopted' and used by later cult followers in some way in their rituals.

It was very desirable for a wealthy noble to have several villas, preferably with a magnificent view. There was a kind of view mania (Clarke 1991:19). The most splendid villas were placed on cliffs overlooking the sea. Architects ran out long covered walks, or porticoes, along the cliffs to give the owner and his guests a fine view and a sheltered place from where it could be enjoyed. The Bay of Naples was a perfect spot for such views; even Emperors had retreats there (Ellis 2002:11).

The Villa of the Mysteries must have had a panoramic view of the Bay of Naples. As many rooms as possible were orchestrated to enjoy the best views. The owner in the

¹³ Nappo (2000:152) believes that the volcanic eruption in 79 CE helped to preserve the beautiful frescoes, as if the house had continue to decline, based on the final transformation stages of the villa, they may have been destroyed in time.

Augustan period, in order to maximize his passion for the view, added a large apsidal room beyond the *tablinum* cutting through the peristyle and extending to the edge of the villa's platform (Clarke 1991:19). This room then showed off framed views of the panorama through its windows.

According to Maiuri (1955:93), the house can be divided into three sections: a) the veranda, *atrium* and living quarters; b) the peristyle, small bath *atrium*, kitchen court and quarters; c) the entrance, servants' quarters, lodgings of the *procurator*, and the agricultural plant. The living rooms and bedrooms were to the rear of the house and opened directly onto terraces and porticoes surrounding three sides of the building (Grant 1979:142). This divided public and private areas of the house (Addendum 1). Longfellow (2000:26) states that this explanation is too simplified and that there should be further graduations. A Roman dwelling had areas with varying degrees of public access. The most public rooms would be closest to the entrance and the least public would be the furthest away. The degree of freedom that a visitor enjoyed depended on social status and relationship to the head of the household. The rooms would also become more elaborately decorated as they became more private. Thus, Room 5 in the Villa of the Mysteries (see Addendum 2) was not far from the entrance of the house. Visitors to the room were able to enter the house via the verandah (Room 1). They then could walk straight to enter the *tablinum* (Room 2) and turn immediately right into Room 4, which led into Room 5. It must have been a fairly public room due to the easy access.

Seaford (2006:61) explains that the frescoes are painted around the walls of a small room in a large house. It could possibly have functioned as a dining room, but Ellis (2002:148-9) notes that three couches were usually in a dining room as semi-permanent fittings. If this room were used as a dining room, there would, therefore, possibly be evidence of the couches remaining.¹⁴

¹⁴ There was, in fact, one house at Pompeii that had a triclinium; unfortunately, however, it was destroyed by Allied bombing on suspicion of a German panzer division hiding in the ruins. Luckily a photograph still exists (Ceram 1960:40-41). the photo shows that the couches and central table were permanent, built-in features. This supports Ellis's view

It became fashionable around the second century BCE for houses to have rooms for private meetings. In the Villa of the Mysteries we see *cubiculum* suites, consisting of a bedroom, two alcoves and an *oecus* for this purpose (Clarke 1991:13). Wallace-Hadrill (1994:113) describes these suites of rooms as each comprising a smaller *cubiculum* and a larger *triclinium*, placed around a central hall. It is a possibility that many guests were invited and housed in these *cubicula*. Married children or even the owner himself could use these suites on different occasions.

The Villa of the Mysteries had its own baths in quite close proximity to the room with the great fresco (Addendum 2). Ellis (2002:10) finds it hard to believe that a villa owner would go to the trouble of having his own individual baths, central heating and personal wall decoration simply to conform to society. Ellis maintains that the house owner was simultaneously conforming to Roman norms *and* adopting specific patterns of behaviour, bathing with his friends and holding dinner parties for them in Roman style. It is probable that the owner entertained in a grand manner.

What kind of luxurious occasions would have taken place in Room 5? Longfellow (2000:31-32) suggests that as there is a cupboard in Room 4, which is directly opposite the door of Room 5 (it also has paintings on a similar theme), that the two rooms were used in conjunction with one another. It is possible that items needed for rituals were stored in the cupboard in Room 4. Longfellow warns that caution is needed in attempting to ascertain the function of a room by its wall decoration, but due to the size and dominance of the paintings in Room 5, it would not be wise to state that they have no relation to these activities at all. At the very least, they must have seemed appropriate to the activities carried out in the room.

Maiuri (1955:93) proposes that the room with the great fresco was only later changed to the dining room and had a different function previously, but what function is unclear. Grant (1979:144) agrees with Maiuri that this room was probably used to entertain guests, dining and reception, as it was the most prestigious in the villa.

The original *triclinium* had paintings on the walls in the Egyptianised, miniaturistic style set against a black background (Maiuri 1955:93). Clarke (1991:94-97) adds the information that not only the dining room, but also the atrium also had Egyptian scenes along the Nile. He elaborates on the style of painting in the house and links it to the purpose of the rooms. Four suites of rooms surrounded the *atrium* and *triclinium* and were all painted in Second Style. He suggests that these separate suites may have had special uses, but these uses are not certain.

Perhaps Rooms 4 & 5 would have been reserved for the *domina*? Could ceremonies preparing brides for marriage(s) have taken place in this room? The concept, colour and design in these two rooms link them together. They portray well-known Dionysiac themes: Dionysus leaning on a satyr; dancing maenads, a dancing satyr;¹⁵ Silenos; and a priestess. Both surviving shutters have scenes of sacrifice: a night scene of a man offering a pig to Priapus and a woman offering cakes to Dionysus. Was the room used for a domestic cult? Many authors believe that a room with such mythological paintings would house a cult. Ellis (2002:137) thinks that these interpretations are based solely on décor and not on architecture. Although the paintings themselves are possibly based thematically on a mystery cult, there appears to have been no other religious objects found in the rooms to substantiate this. Mobile objects with depictions of gods were common in all rooms of Roman houses and can rarely be used to prove a cult association (Ellis 2002:137).

Conclusion

The Villa of the Mysteries was an old building at the time of the eruption and must have had a number of owners, although how many is not known to us. It was probably a country villa, situated a little out of town due to its focus on the semi-agricultural activities of the owner. It appears that the villa was originally built as a modest dwelling,

¹⁵ Seaford (2006:68) tells of an initiate into the cult of Dionysus from Philadelphia in Lydia who was represented as a dancing satyr in an inscription.

which grew to magnificence around the time that the frescoes were painted and then fell into decline over the years. The house could have been used to house mystery cult rituals, but in honour of which god is not clear. Based on the many depictions of Dionysiac images in Rooms 4 and 5, Dionysus/Bacchus is a popular choice, but not conclusive. Apart from a cult ritual, other possible activities that could have taken place in the room with the frescoes are: quarters for the *domina* of the house, an area for weddings, preparation for marriage, or simply for entertaining guests at a banquet.

Whether the guests were male, female or a mixture of both sexes has been much debated. However, although there is much female imagery, it is more likely that both male and female guests would have been entertained in the room, possibly with theatrical performance.

The great fresco was painted in a home in which both the business and private life of the owner took place. The owner was careful to show himself in a good light to visitors. His wealth, stable family life, religious integrity and political status would be displayed to the best effect. Even less wealthy home owners would still attempt to create a home as opulent as possible. Displaying his position as an honourable Roman citizen was his primary aim.

Different areas of the house were reserved for invited and uninvited guests. Public rooms were decorated more conservatively than private rooms. Some scholars think that art followed fashion, others that the art was commissioned predominantly for maximum effect. Making sure that there were magnificent views of the Bay of Naples was a prerequisite to impressing guests.

The notion that the home was inhabited by members of the Istacidii family is shared by some scholars. Links have been made to the Julio-Claudian dynasty and also to the goddess Livia-Ceres, based on discoveries of sculpture in the house. It must be noted, however, that the cult of Livia-Ceres was begun by Livia, wife of Augustus, after his

death and many years after the paintings were executed. The only possibility in this case could have been that a priestess of this later cult 'adopted' the paintings for her religious activities.



CHAPTER FOUR: STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS – SYNTACTICS AND SEMANTICS

Scope

The first part of this chapter will attempt to describe each of the scenes, the characters in the scenes, objects and events in the scenes in the great frieze according to information gathered by various scholars. It will also investigate their interpretations of the scenes and related questions: How are the scenes segmented? And in what order should they be read? Who do the characters, or persons, in the scenes refer to? What do the objects in the frescoes refer to? What do the events refer to? How do the characters, objects, events and scenes relate to each other? Conclusions will be drawn from this existing information. Once the above has been illuminated, the second part of this chapter will aim to separate the scenes in a different way by using tables that have been created based on personal observations. These tables, together with information gathered from the first part of the chapter will be used to draw further conclusions on the overall meaning of the frescoes.

In what order should the scenes be read?

The order in which the scenes should be read is much debated (Kirk 2000:110). Are they continuous? Are the various events to be read simultaneously or successively? Or are they just an incoherent set of images? If the frieze is continuous then where does it start? If the viewer attempts to sort out the meaning of the frieze by trying to find a sequence of actions, he or she would be most likely to turn towards the north wall in order to read the frieze from left to right. This would be a comfortable method of reading the scenes for a modern viewer. The sequence would then begin with a veiled woman who appears to walk into the scene looking over the shoulder of a nude boy who is reading a scroll and would culminate with the final picture of a woman calmly surveying the scene from a distance. Burkert (1987:95) is one of many authors who believes that the frieze should be read in this sequence.

There could be two possible ways of viewing, according to Clarke (1991:99), from the axis of the room and clockwise. He also mentions that due to the layout of the room, with its U-shape, entrances and window, fitting the frieze into the space would have posed a problem for the artist and may have required some manoeuvres. Clarke believes that the composition was designed specifically for the space. The central figures are also tailor-made for the space they occupy. Perhaps a scene is 'out of sequence', as it simply did not fit the design of the room? This should be taken into consideration when attempting to identify the sequence in which the frescoes should be read.

Clarke (1991:10) bases his argument on the fact that a person entering the room would immediately look at the two figures in the scene in front of them. This would set the theme of the whole room with two central figures overseeing the whole frieze. A different interpretation is offered by Nappo (1998:154-156) who believes that the seated *domina* (who is commonly understood as the final painting in the sequence) is actually the first scene. He describes her as the initiate waiting pensively for her initiation ceremony, thereby setting the theme of the overall work. The scene where the boy is reading the scroll would then be second.

Varone (2001:98) agrees with Clarke regarding the dominance of the two central figures, but adds that the pictures on the lateral walls should be read in parallel, converging on the central scene on the back wall. Elsner (2007:88) proposes another way of reading the scenes: that the images, symbols and characters point the viewer around the scenes in the order that they should be followed.

What is apparent is that the correct order in which the original artist intended the scenes to be read is not known. Therefore there is much written on the topic. For ease of identification the descriptions below following the wall plan compiled by Gazda (2000:3) (see Addendum 2) will be used at this stage of the dissertation. It has been chosen on the basis of available photographs and information. Once the reader is familiar with the images in the scenes and the possible meanings of these images offered by various

authors listed and compared beneath each one (in part one of this chapter), tables showing different layouts and further meanings will follow.

Scenes according to layout shown in Addendum 2

Scene A – Standing woman, child reading text, seated woman and woman with tray



Scene A

In this first scene on the north wall there is woman standing, a boy reading a scroll, a seated woman holding a second scroll and a third woman walking away from the group holding a platter with cakes or bread. There is no clear understanding as to the identity of the women or the boy.

It is not definite whether or not the standing woman is a Bacchic initiate, according to Brendel (1980:92), but it is certain that she is important. She is dressed in a fashionable way and is standing with her hand on her hip, which is an unusual pose for a dignified Roman woman. She also could be pregnant. This type of dress with a cloak covering the

head would be most likely to be worn out of doors, so this figure could be entering the scene from an outside realm (Guhl & Kohner 1994:483). She is, however, a real person, not a mythological one. She appears to enter as if she is to follow a path through the other scenes. This would add to the belief that this is actually the first scene of the frescoes. But what is her purpose? If she is pregnant, then does her visit have something to do with this? Or is her reason for entering based on a religious intention? Snow-Smith (2005:110) has no doubt that the woman is a Bacchic initiate listening to unknown words or possibly to a prayer being read from a papyrus. Seaford (no date) finds it almost impossible to tell whether the seated woman or the standing woman is the initiate, as either would fit the role.

The exact content and purpose of the text that the boy beside the seated woman is reading is unknown, as is his identity. This scene could possibly portray part of a sacred ritual, in which the woman who is listening who is listening to him is holding other sacred texts in her left hand. A sacred papyrus containing the prescriptions of the ritual being read under the guidance of a seated matron whilst another woman is standing listening religiously to the ritual is the preferred interpretation given by Maiuri (1955:95). Grant (1979:146) believes that the boy is not human at all, but the young god himself. He maintains that the series of paintings begins with the education of the god as a child and that he is reading his rites beside his mother Semele. A different opinion is given by Benvenuto (1984:xiv-xv): that the child is either one of the sacred youths assigned to be ministers at the service of Dionysus, or he is representing a young Dionysus reading the ritual under the guidance of his mother Demeter¹⁶ or Kore/Persephone. Turcan (1992:308) does not agree with either Grant or Benvenuto and proposes that this is a boy dressed up to represent the infant Bacchus, reading a text under the attentive direction of a priestess. He bases this on

¹⁶ Ceres/Demeter presided over marriage and fertility, as did Proserpina/Persephone; they therefore exerted influence over important events in the life of women: marriage, childbirth and death. These goddesses also represented all women which may have accounted for the popularity of the cults. Ceres/Demeter and Libera/Proserpina/Persephone often were portrayed with Eleusinian attributes including: baskets of wheat, crowns of wheat stalks, snakes, chariots drawn by snakes and torches (Hammer 2000:41).

his statement that it was quite common to have a child-priest in the cult of Dionysus¹⁷. Varone (2001:99) describes the naked boy as simply a symbol representing truth and innocence, thereby disagreeing with Maiuri, Grant, Benvenuto and Turcan.

The Bacchic initiation ceremony does involve the reading of a sacred text where the initiate swears allegiance to the god Dionysus¹⁸, but Brendel (1980:93) notes, as the content of the text is unknown, that the viewer cannot be sure that the god portrayed is in fact Dionysus, because many ceremonies dedicated to other deities would begin with the reading of a text in a similar way.

(Grant 1979:146) identifies the pregnant woman beside them, carrying a tray of unleavened cakes sacred to Ceres¹⁹, as possibly Spring, one of the Seasons. Although Snow-Smith (2005:110) agrees with Grant that the cakes on the tray are offerings, she maintains that the god being honoured is Dionysus²⁰, not Ceres and that the cakes are a symbol of harvest and fertility of the land. There is a connection between pregnancy and Dionysus, because traditionally everyone who touched the belly of Semele when she was pregnant with her child, became simultaneously possessed by the god inside her, therefore Seaford (2006:91) agrees with Snow-Smith that the god is Dionysus.

¹⁷ The child would read the texts as the adult performed the initiation ceremony. Seaford (no date) explains that initiation and marriage both had ritual formulae spoken by a child at the ceremonies. He continues to state that the initiate could just as easily be a bride as an initiate or priestess in these paintings. If so, the room could have been used for wedding ceremonies (refer to the function of the room in Chapter 3).

¹⁸ The appearance of images of Dionysus on walls, pottery, mosaics, gems and even funerary art marks the spreading of this popular cult. From these artworks and additional literary sources Turcan (1992:307) gives us an approximate idea of the Bacchic ritual: The initiations were performed at night. Originally the ceremonies were carried out only once in two years, but this sometimes altered to several times a year and even once a month at the time when the Bacchanalia were suppressed in 186 BCE. It is possible that mysterious celebrations were also enacted at the time of the grape harvest (Turcan 1992:308).

¹⁹ Ceres, associated with Liber and Libera, was a very important goddess in ancient Rome, who, in her basic form, was the goddess of cereal crops and fertility. She was not only popular because of her influence over fertility, but also a model for the ideal Roman *matrona* with virtues of chastity and motherhood (Hammer 2000:40).

²⁰ Brendell (1980:93) makes particular mention of the mantle wound around the hips of the woman holding the silver platter. It is the same as that worn by Acolytes, male and female servants, who often wear this kind of mantle in sacrificial scenes on Dionysiac monuments.

Although there are many differing opinions and interpretations that can be considered regarding this scene, Brendel (1980:93) notes that the most important observation is that it definitely represents some sort of entrance rite. In the course of the frieze this is the preparatory episode and there are probably subordinate episodes.

In conclusion the identity of the standing woman is uncertain. She seems to be a human figure, dressed in an unusual fashion, who could possibly be pregnant. She appears to have entered the scene in order to be initiated into one of the mystery cults, according to many scholars. Her entry into the scene could also be based on pregnancy, the desire to become pregnant or to become a wife.

The identity of the boy reading the text is similarly unclear. He has been identified as either human or mythological and described as a sacred youth, a child-priest, a child dressed as the infant Bacchus, the young god himself, or simply a symbol of truth and innocence. The boy, however, definitely appears to be reading a text to represent some kind of ritual marking the beginning of a ceremony.

The seated woman is possibly a priestess, an initiate into a mystery cult or a bride. She could even be Semele, the mother of Dionysus. There appears to be some confusion as to whether the seated or the standing woman is the initiate. It is also questionable whether either of the figures to the left or right is pregnant, as is whether the right-hand figure carrying the tray is one of the Seasons, Spring. If pregnancy is depicted then these images could easily portray fertility. The standing woman is carrying cakes on a tray that are unanimously agreed to be offerings, but in honour of which god? Ceres and Dionysus are popular choices.

Scene B – Seated woman, two attendants and an old satyr playing a lyre



Scene B

In this scene a woman is sitting with her back to the viewer. She is lifting a cloth on a table while one of two attendants pours liquid from a jug onto a plate.²¹ Maiuri (1955:95) describes the scene as a young girl holding offerings on a dish whilst a group of three women carry out a sacrificial ceremony. A different view is offered by Grant (1979:147): he continues with the idea from the previous scene that the women shown are Seasons and that the three women represent Summer, Autumn and Winter.²² Brendel (1980:93) agrees with Maiuri and upholds that this scene represents a sacrificial rite of some sort, an idea with which Snow-Smith (2005:110) is also in agreement: she identifies the seated woman as a priestess, who is in the act of conducting a sacrifice assisted by two attendants.

²¹ The servant girl who is bending is the only member of the scene who is not wearing an olive wreath.

²² According to Larson (2001:7-8) the Seasons (Horai) are primarily cultic entities who also function as escorts of the gods and goddesses. The Horai are said by Hesiod to be the daughters of Zeus and Themis and are simple personifications of the order of nature (like the seasons: Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter).

Brendel (1980:93) finds it interesting that this priestess does not notice the initiate (in Scene A), as she is looking in the other direction (away from the initiate and offering plate). She is entirely focused on the pouring of the liquid by the woman on her right. According to Varone (2001:99) the seated woman's right hand is being sprinkled with lustral water by an officiant, whilst unveiling sacred objects with her left hand. The onlooker cannot see that there are objects under the cloth that she is lifting.²³ The fabric itself, however, is exactly the same colour and approximate size of the material in which she is clothed in later scenes. Could this be a ritual washing and cleansing? Would she then take off her garments to wear the cloth? Could she be pouring a libation?²⁴ Why is her back to the viewer? Is there a secret that the viewer is prevented from seeing?

Brendel (1980:93) observes that the whole scene is not typical of a Bacchic ritual or any other cultic sacrificial practice, as the priestess is seated and this is not the usual custom. This figure does, however, appear to be receiving some kind of offering of cakes from the woman with the silver plate in Scene A, which may confirm that she is in fact a priestess.

The sudden movement from the world of real people to the mythical world is pointed out by Brendel (1980:96) as a naked old satyr appears abruptly playing his lyre in this scene to the right of the women. All scholars agree that this character is Silenos,²⁵ who is traditionally a constant companion of and tutor to Dionysus (De Carolis 2001:104).

²³ Brendel (1980:93) identifies the surmised object to the left of the priestess as a piece of twig and that there is another piece of twig being sprinkled with liquid to her right. Although it is difficult to be sure what the offering is, it is not a blood offering.

²⁴ Price & Kearns (2003:317-318) offer some explanation regarding libations. They can be interpreted as the ritual pouring of wine, milk or honey in honour of gods, heroes or the dead. This ritual pouring was the human participation in meals and other acts to mark the beginning or the end of the ceremony. In Dionysiac ceremonies wine would be poured to gain divine favour. Traditionally a libation of wine and honey was poured into the earth of lands that had been reached for the first time in order to gain favour with the new gods and the souls of dead heroes. They did this to obtain aid for a successful visit and a warm welcome. Libations with wine or without were poured from a jug into a bowl, then onto an altar or into the ground.

²⁵ Room (1983:275) refers to Silenos (son of Pan and a nymph) as a mixture between a dirty old man and an alcoholic! Yet he does have the redeeming powers of prophecy and wisdom.

Snow-Smith (2005) confirms that the figure playing his lyre is Silenos, an old satyr who was considered to hold the secret of wisdom.

Silenos' pose is typical of a lyre player resting his lyre on a stone pillar whilst singing to his own accompaniment. The reason he is playing his 9-stringed lyre²⁶ is debated: Maiuri (1961:102) described Silenos here as part of a pastoral scene (goats and pan-pipes follow in Scene C), singing ecstatically whilst he is strumming the strings. Brendel (1980:96) maintains that Silenos is portrayed as an artist and singer, but adds that this action represents the first allusion to the Bacchic sphere of madness. Silenos' desire to play is simply caused by his delight to see Dionysus and Ariadne is the interpretation offered by Nappo (1998:156). De Carolis (2001:104) does not agree and notes that, as Silenos is playing the lyre simultaneously to the ceremony being performed, this act marks the commencement of the ceremony and also symbolizes cosmic harmony.

It is interesting to note that Silenos' gaze is fixed on Dionysus and Ariadne on the end wall (Maiuri 1955:95; 1961:102). He appears to be looking away from the Scene he is supposed to be part of, outside the picture he is in. The second part of the chapter will investigate this further.

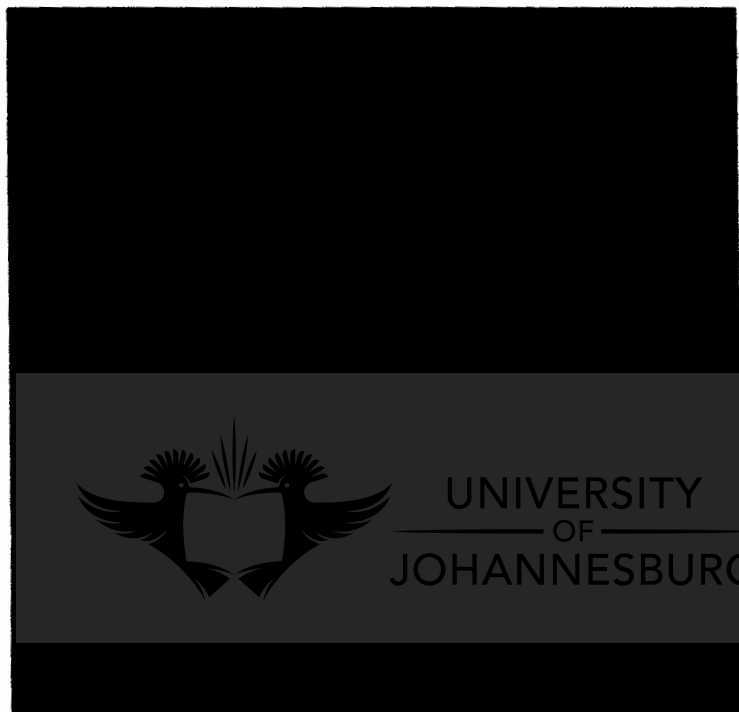
It is interesting to note that there appears to be a snake coiled around the column to Silenos' left. Ferguson (1970:13) explains that the worship of a feminine archetype is deeply embedded in human nature. It is symbolised by a great snake (the *ouroboros*) shaped in a round that devours its own tail. This ancient symbol of a serpent could possibly increase the overall depiction of fertility in the frescoes.

To conclude: the seated woman is possibly a priestess performing a rite, according to all of the cited scholars. Why her back is turned to the viewer is, however, unclear. What is she hiding? This secret is unknown. The three other women in the scene are either attendants, or the Seasons: Summer, Autumn and Winter.

²⁶ Traditionally a lyre would have had 7 strings – 9 strings is not usual.

All interpretations agree that the old naked satyr is Silenos, companion of Dionysus. This would increase the probability that Dionysus is the god referred to in the frescoes. Why Silenos is playing his lyre is not easy to decipher and there are many different views as to his purpose in this scene.

Scene C – Terrified woman with shawl above head, Pan figure, female figure with pointed ears suckling goat



Scene C

There are three characters in this scene, two of which are seated on a rock.²⁷ One woman is standing with her shawl cast above her head. Her left hand is raised in an agitated and

²⁷ It was common for Bacchants to meet on the fringe of existing cults, on private property, in parks or woods that were considered sacred. Trees, rocks and painted images would provide a suitable background to the ceremonies. In the case of an initiation, this would most likely commence with the sacrifice of a pig or cock. Certain plants and the contents of sacred wicker baskets were blessed beforehand. The candidate would then take an oath, swearing to keep the details of the ceremony secret. This would be followed by a commitment to serve the god Dionysus. The ceremony would continue with a kind of investiture, where the initiate would be dressed in the skin of a fawn or other similar animal and crowned with sacred foliage, like ivy or myrtle. A thyrsus or vine branch would be placed in the candidate's hands. It was even possible to receive a tattoo to show belonging – an ivy leaf would have been a suitable symbol. On occasion white make-up would have been applied in memory of the Titans whitened with gypsum (Turcan 1992:308).

defensive gesture, as if she is warding something off. The interpretation given by Maiuri (1955: 95; 1961:103) is that the figure is a frightened woman who is about to be initiated. She is recoiling from the winged demon who is scourging one of her companions. Grant (1979:147) does not agree with Maiuri and believes that the terror-stricken woman represents Aura, a wind nymph, who had a child fathered by Dionysus towards whom she is looking in the following scene. The woman pulling the shawl above her head is afraid of something, according to Brendel (1980:98). He maintains that there is little doubt regarding the interpretation of the iconography of this action, as ritual. He raises the following questions: "What is she terrified of?" Could she be afraid of unveiling the phallus? Or is she perhaps afraid of being beaten? It has been suggested that the whole painting was a copy of an original and, due to the irregular layout of the room, certain scenes were omitted to fit the painting to the new space (Brendel 1980:100). This would make it difficult to assess what the girl was afraid of. Perhaps it is all somewhat out of context? In this layout she is, however, looking towards the scene with the phallus and the flagellation and not away from it. Benvenuto (1984:xv) prefers the interpretation that the woman is not afraid of the following scene with the old satyr and the mask, but rather of the preceding scene depicting Pan, the god of panic and rural delight. If this is the case then her first impulse would naturally be to flee.²⁸ A more simple interpretation is given by Nappo (1998:156): that the girl is frightened by the sight of Dionysus and his retinue.

A different view is given by Varone (2001:104). He believes that this is not a terrified figure, but is a maenad swaying in a dizzying dance to the sound of the pan-pipes being played. Maenads, in a mad frenzy, often accompanied Dionysus and were part of his festivals. The meaning of Maenad is "mad woman" (Room 1983:191). According to

²⁸ It is interesting to note that the syrinx that the character on the left is playing is named after a Naiad that Pan attempted to catch and failed (Ovid *Met.* 1.689ff.). In this scene, however, the woman does not look like a nymph and is not being actively pursued by any other character. Pan also was most comfortable in the processions of Dionysus, adding an element of madness. The followers of Dionysus, once possessed by Pan, took on his bearing, laughed madly for no apparent reason, threw themselves on members of the opposite sex (or their own if the fancy took them) or were seized by epilepsy (Goring 1991:157). According to Room (1983:227) Pan often terrified unwary travelers in the fields. Many were very frightened of his sudden appearances. They became panicky if they thought he was around (the word pan-ic is derived from these appearances by Pan).

mythology these characters were known to run in ecstasy through the hills and fields. Maenads were sometimes represented with wild animals and occasionally suckled them (Seaford 2006:24).

A seated woman with pointed ears is breast-feeding a kid behind the standing woman. A Bacchante suckling a fawn is the explanation of this character given by Nappo (1998:156) whereas Varone (2001:104) identifies her as a panisca (female Pan) who is breast-feeding a fawn to symbolize the universal love that binds all creatures, forming a typical pastoral scene. Snow-Smith (2005:110) disagrees with Nappo and Varone, as she describes this female figure as a nymph. Snow-Smith argues that pictures of Silenos, young satyrs and nymphs were commonly depicted as companions of Dionysus; however, she does add that the suckling of animals did occur in Bacchic rituals in partial agreement with Nappo.

A third figure with pointed ears is watching from behind the female figures while playing pan-pipes. He appears to have the hairy legs and arms of a goat. Grant (1979:147) proposes that this is a young satyr playing a syrinx (pan-pipes) whilst watching a female satyr suckling a goat. Although Varone above refers to the character playing the syrinx as Pan. Goring (1991:156) describes Pan, the son of Hermes and Penelope, as having a long wrinkled face and a beard. The lower part of his body is that of a goat with cloven hooves. Pan was an ithyphallic, lascivious, debauched monster. This particular image is of a clean-shaven creature or person with pointed ears, not the hairy monster that we would expect if it were the Pan that Goring describes. Other elements in the scene could relate to the Pan myth, however. Pan is reputed to have been constantly pursuing nymphs who would flee in terror. The terror-stricken woman to the right of the two characters with pointed ears, could be perceived as fleeing from this Pan figure. In agreement with Grant, Nappo (1998:156) also describes this character as a satyr, not Pan, as explained by Goring.

Brendel (1980:96) refers to the presumably male character playing the syrinx and the female character suckling the kid as 'creatures.' He notes that they are not human, as they

have pointed ears and belong to the family of satyrs. They are alone as a group and do not interact with other characters in the scene. Brendel points out that the relationship between bucolic poetry and Bacchic features is well known. Here the satyr children take the place of shepherd and shepherdess as guardians of the flock of goats isolated in a rocky landscape.

In conclusion the three characters in this scene have varied interpretations. The two figures to the left have pointed ears, so are probably mythological characters. The figure to the far left appears to be male with goat's legs. It has been suggested that he is either a young satyr or Pan. The female character to his right could be a Panisca or a nymph. The standing woman with the shawl above her head has been identified as Aura, a wind nymph, a dancing maenad or a terrified initiate. The most popular idea is that she is afraid of something and the possibilities are the Pan figure, the winged demon, flagellation or the phallus in following scenes.

Scene D (a) – Old satyr holding bowl, mask, man with head in lap of woman, two young men with pointed ears, one looking into the bowl, the other holding the mask



Scene D (left hand section)

In this scene an old satyr is holding a bowl that is being looked into by a younger person whilst a third person stands behind the bowl holding up a mask.²⁹ A fourth man is to their right is wearing a laurel wreath and is lying sprawled across the lap of a woman (the head is missing).

An interpretation of the act portrayed in the left hand section of the scene suggested by Grant (1979:147) is that Silenos is giving a drink to the two satyrs, one of which is holding a fearsome theatrical mask³⁰ over his head, an interpretation that is echoed by Nappo (1998:156). Snow-Smith (2005:110) informs us that the satyr holding the mask above his head is definitely indicating the presence of Dionysus with this action.³¹

The bowl that is being held up by Silenos is of particular interest. But there is much uncertainty in the meaning of the scene and there are many possibilities under discussion. Brendel (1980:106), however, mentions that an oracle or prophecy from a reflection in wine was common practice in ancient times. He continues to assume that the mask that is being held up is going to be removed from Silenos by the young satyr. The image or knowledge that is revealed (or unveiled) to the young satyr mirrors the unveiling of the phallus on the other side of the group of gods. Brendel suggests that the terrified girl in the previous scene may be terrified of the demonic mask and at the same time amazed by the double play, as the two-faced nature of Silenos becomes known to her. As soon as she

²⁹ A requirement of the cult was that initiates were to keep the secret revealed at the ceremony. Vows of silence were taken to ensure that no information was to be shared with outsiders. Although these ceremonies were mostly hidden from us, we do know that devotees assembled at a holy place for rituals of initiation. In the Eleusian mysteries there were three types of sacred observances: *legomena* (things recited); *deiknymena* (things shown); and *dromena* (things performed). The *dromena* may have included a variety of rituals. These productions were mostly staged by priests. The company of initiates played the various roles of the mythological characters. They wore masks or costumes to act out the stories of the suffering, sorrows and joys of the gods and goddesses. These three categories applied mostly to the mysteries of Kore and Demeter, but were also used in other mystery cults (Meyer 1987:4-12).

³⁰ Seaford (2006:63) refers to the mask in this scene as a 'fierce Silenos mask'.

³¹ In Greece, the god was at times only represented by a mask hung on a pillar as an effigy during festivals in his honour. The mask also refers to Greek theatre, held annually during the "Great Dionysia". The figure of Silenos appears to have become drunk with his own music and singing. It was believed that through frenzied singing and dancing a person could have a union with the god for a brief moment (Snow-Smith 2005:110).

recognizes him, she flees. This opinion is not shared by Benvenuto (1984:xv) for she maintains that it is more probable that Silenos is predicting the whipping that appears in the following scene. Brendel's interpretation of this scene is preferred by Burkert (1987:164): that it is controversial; the drinking of wine and the probability of a mirror effect being involved have both been contested. Burkert maintains that the boy sees himself changed into an old satyr. Seaford (no date) agrees with Benvenuto that the scene represents a prediction, but does not attempt to offer an interpretation of the action as a prophecy. When the scenes were first discovered it was generally believed that the young satyr was drinking from the cup, but now the scene is mostly perceived as one of lecanomancy (divination by the observation of images seen in a liquid in a basin) or of catoptromancy (divination by images seen reflected on a shining surface). Although this is not totally convincing as judging by the curved, closed shape of the bowl and the closeness of the satyr's face there can be no reflection of the mask or his own face – he's too close and no light could get in; the bowl is also not securely held enough to present a smooth enough surface to act as a mirror. In this case, Maiuri would seem right: the satyr is going to drink – and wine is the obvious liquid; the satyr's eyes are wide and focused, in eagerness and anticipation rather than fear or apprehension. Silenos's attitude also suggests he's nonchalantly offering the potion, not holding a "mirror". This interpretation seems too obtruse for a wall painting. Ancient iconography, often indecipherable for us, needed to be and was clear to the contemporary viewer. Perhaps scholars are looking for a more complicated meaning than was intended? It is also interesting that Silenos is looking away from the bowl (and the scene). His face is turned three-quarters to his right, to the scenes on the north wall to his left; somehow he's connecting with the previous scene. He does not appear to be interested in the reflection if there is one. The medium in the form of the satyr tells Silenos what he sees. Silenos is the interpreter. He reveals the contents of the oracle to the girl and she in turn is terrified. Seaford suggests that this is not the only interpretation of the scene and that it still remains a mystery. He does, however, throw light on some elements. For example that the scene is a unity. If the mask that is being held up is a Silenos mask, then the object that is being revealed is not a *liknon* containing a phallus and fruit, but a Silenos mask. If it is an object of revelation then it could relate to the rest of the scene in various ways: the mask could be seen by the

young satyr reflected in the bowl or there could be a completely different reflection in the bowl; the girl or the satyr could be afraid of either the mask or the reflection; is it not certain if it is the startled girl or the satyr who sees the reflection or understands the meaning.

The mask of Silenos played a notable role in Dionysiac imagery (Turcan 1992:309). Initiates had to undergo a series of psychological ordeals (similar to initiation into the cult of Mithras). It was probable that priests of the cult would dress up and attempt to terrify the candidate during the ceremony.³² The fact that the apparently terrified woman in the previous scene is directly to the left of the mask that is being held high, and looking towards it, would reinforce this idea.

The part that mirrors and reflection played in a Dionysiac ritual is not clear in any of the cited sources. Seaford (no date) points out that ancient mirrors gave a much less clear reflection than a modern mirror. They were made of polished metal and not glass. The satyr would have seen a confusing image in the bowl. The question would then be: what might the function be of this confusing reflection in the initiation ceremony? Confusion and riddles are also part of tribal initiation and could have some influence on the interpretation of the scene.

Silenos to their right could be offering a cup containing the satyrion (nectar that opens up the mind to reality) to one satyr, whilst another satyr holds up a Silenos mask to symbolize the transmission of knowledge and wisdom that the magic potion in the cup has to offer. It is interesting to note that the satyr is choosing to look away from the bowl (the viewer could assume that it has liquid inside that would cause a reflection?). As a different man is looking into the bowl, the problem of viewing is complex. The triangle created could be interpreted in different ways: Does he see his own reflection? Does he see the reflection of the ugly or theatrical mask? Does he see an omen? Does he see something completely different that the onlooker is not allowed to see? Or is the bowl

³² Masks are often used in tribal initiation to inspire fear in the novice according to Seaford (no date).

empty? Would the mask signify that the whole fresco is a depiction of a drama? What this image would mean to a historical viewer is complicated.

If a reflection of self in the bowl were intended, then the Narcissus myth and its resultant lesson could be associated with the imagery. There were many depictions of this myth in art at this time indicating its popularity.³³

The sprawling figure in the right hand section of the scene is lying in a chair with a staff with some foliage at the end resting against it. All accounts agree that this represents a thyrsus, a stick with laurel leaves and a pine cone used in Bacchic rituals. Mauri (1955:95; 1961:102) maintained that the wedding of Dionysus and Ariadne is being portrayed, representing the bliss that awaits the initiated in the other world that they will enter. This scene is described by Grant (1979:147) as Silenos giving a drink to two satyrs whilst Dionysus is outstretched in a drunken state lying in the lap of his wife Ariadne.³⁴ She is the daughter of Minos, King of Crete, who fell in love with Theseus, but married Dionysus.³⁵ Wilburn (2000:57-57) does not maintain that the scenes depict images of wine and drunkenness, for the relaxed pose may mean that he is simply languishing happily in the lap of a woman. It may not be Dionysus who is portrayed, but Liber?³⁶

³³ Narcissus was the symbol of self love. He was the son of the river god Cephissus and the nymph Liriope. It was prophesied that he would live to old age provided that he never looked at himself. Many fell deeply in love with the handsome youth, but he in return cared for no-one. A friend, Aminius, who loved Narcissus, eventually killed himself in despair. Nemesis, the daughter of Night, decided to avenge his death and the fate of other victims to whom Narcissus was indifferent (Goring 1991:135). On a particular warm day, when Narcissus was tired and thirsty, he leaned over a spring to drink. He saw his reflection in the water and immediately fell in love with his own image. As Narcissus leaned closer he lost his balance, fell into the water and drowned. Nemesis had punished him for not giving himself to others (Goring 1991:135).

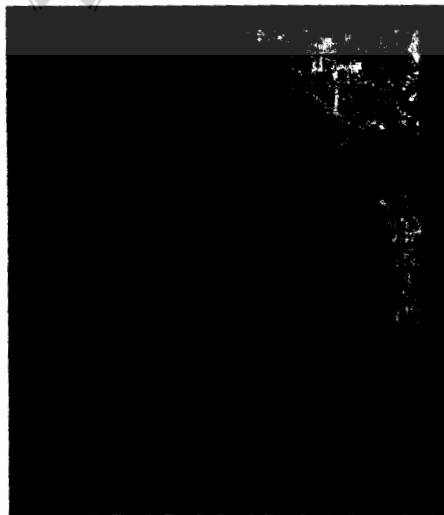
³⁴ Benvenuto (1984:xvi) explains that Dionysus was initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries by his mother. Perhaps his head is not in the lap of his wife, but his mother? This is striking to a psychoanalyst because of the repressed mother-son incestuous relationship.

³⁵ She had a very complimentary name meaning 'pure and chaste. (Room 1983:63).

³⁶ The Roman Liber was primarily regarded as the god concerned with fertility, whereas the god's relationship with wine became less significant (Wilburn 2000:54). He is also called Liber Pater (father) He was the Italian god of wine and fertility and was commonly associated with Dionysus. Liber and Libera seem to have originally formed a couple associated with seeds, both agricultural and human. The phallus was often paraded through the towns and fields whilst

Wilburn proposes that the scene represents fertility. The ribbons of the thyrsus are dangling phallus-like, pointing towards the groin of the god. The thyrsus itself is a phallic symbol. This idea is echoed by the suggestion of a phallus inside the basket. These images reinforce Wilburn's belief that fertility is the motive behind the imagery. The entablature above the frieze would echo this. It has images of ivy, grapevines, small animals, insects and butterflies, which imply fertility. The Ara Pacis of Augustus had similar images to promote the family, childbirth, fertility and sexuality. The images of Cupids together with these natural images suggest the goddess Venus. Her partial dress also suggests sexuality and fertility. Wilburn as ancient viewers would have associated these scenes with abundance, fertility and sexuality. Dionysus, as all other male figures in the frescoes, is in a very relaxed and non-threatening, almost emasculated, state. He appears almost effeminate in his pose. Effeminacy and transvestism of Dionysus manifested itself in rituals (Seaford 2006:53). Gender-reversal was common in rites of passage. This scene possibly reflects this other persona of the god. Seaford (2006:61) maintains that the woman holding Dionysus' head in her lap is his wife, Ariadne in agreement with Maiuri and Grant.

Scene D (b) – Reclining male figure lying in lap of woman (head missing)



Scene D (right hand section)

followers sang crude songs. Liber was also associated with the transition of young boys into adulthood (Price & Kearns (2003:316).

Honour & Fleming (1995:156) also agree that Dionysus and Ariadne are the characters in this scene and that the eternal bliss of the initiate who has espoused the god is symbolised. This interpretation is opposed by Varone (2001:105) who argues that the female figure who is holding Dionysus' head in her lap is Venus herself, the goddess of love.³⁷ Venus was a very popular goddess during the Roman era of Pompeii. This female figure is holding an object that appears to be a ball in her left hand,³⁸ which may be a symbol of warning. As this female figure would have been the tallest of all in the frescoes (if not partially destroyed), she would have dominated the original frescoes and it is feasible that she could have been Venus due to her position of visual authority.

Elsner (2007:89) describes this scene as the marriage of Dionysus and Ariadne representing divine fulfilment in the midst of scenes of ritual whipping and prophecy. Elsner agrees with Maiuri and Seaford that the most probable identity of the woman is Ariadne, wife of Dionysus, but adds that there is a possibility that she could be his mother, Semele.



³⁷ Venus, Aphrodite, Persephone and Dionysus were associated with marriage (Kirk 2000:98). Aphrodite's Roman counterpart is Venus. Venus/Aphrodite was a major goddess, mostly worshipped by women. She represented beauty, love, fertility and sexuality. Venus Pompeiana was the patron goddess of Pompeii. There was a temple dedicated to her in the centre of the city (Hammer 2000:43). Venus played a major role in Roman religious ceremonies, festivals and myths. According to Homer (*Il.*5.370) Aphrodite had two possible ancestries. She was known as the daughter of Zeus and Dione, the Oceanid. Another account states that she was born from the foam of the sea (Hesiod *Theo.* 190ff.) Aphrodite was the unfaithful wife of the lame Hephaestus and was in love with at least four other gods: Ares, Hermes, Poseidon and Dionysus. She loved beauty and also recognized it in others. She was able to grant beauty and irresistible charm and she owned a magic girdle that could make the wearer an object of passionate desire. This goddess stirred up both love and admiration at the same time as hate and jealousy. Eros, the son of Aphrodite, is closely associated with Cupid. Sacred to this goddess are: the rose, apple and poppy and also dolphins, swans, the ram, hare, swallow. In art, she was often portrayed with her son, Eros. Venus/Aphrodite was the goddess of marriage and family life, who eventually degenerated into the goddess of lust.

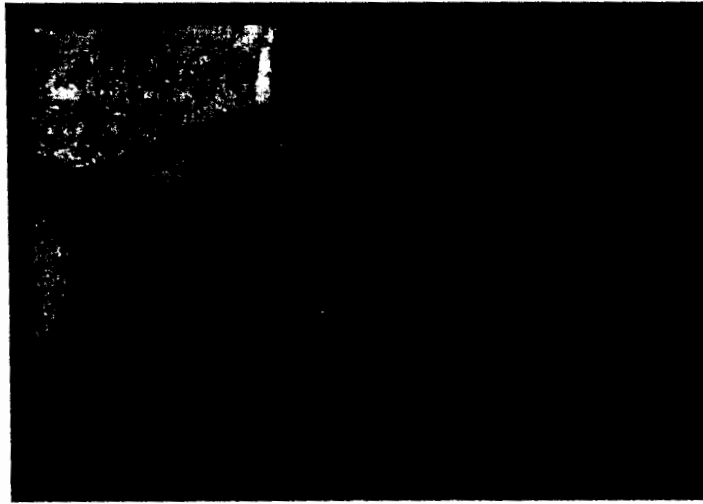
³⁸ Seaford (2006:73) lists some of the toys by which the Titans lured Dionysus to his dismemberment. The list includes a ball and a mirror, both of which appear in the frescoes. This could imply a message of warning to the onlooker. Another possibility is that it is an apple, as Aphrodite is often portrayed with an apple in Roman copies of Hellenistic statues.

To summarise Scene D (left): it is generally believed that the old satyr with the bowl is Silenos repeated from Scene B. He is showing the contents of the bowl to two young satyrs. The content of the bowl has more than one interpretation raising many questions: Is it wine in the bowl? Has Silenos finished it? Is he drunk? Perhaps they are reading a prophecy? Is there a reflection in the bowl? If so, of what? No unanimous conclusion was reached by the above scholars.

The nature and significance of the mask are also in question. Is it a symbol or mask of Dionysus? Or is it a Silenos mask? It has been suggested that it represents the whole meaning of the frieze as an acted drama to the viewer. It is possible that the mask is to instil fear in the onlooker, as a kind of warning of a certain type of behaviour or belief – the lessons of the Narcissus myth for example.

To summarise Scene D (right): these two characters have been identified as Dionysus and Ariadne, Dionysus and Semele, Venus and Liber, and even just as friends. They dominate and set the theme for the frescoes as a whole, due to the central positioning of these figures on the east wall and the height of the woman in whose lap the other figure is resting. The female figure could be Venus, as the character is most likely to be a very prominent goddess, due to her size and position in the room.

Scene E – Kneeling woman, phallus in basket, winged figure with stick



Scene E

Scene E shows a kneeling woman holding her outstretched hands above a basket containing a large pointed object covered with a cloth. Beside her is a standing figure with dark wings holding a stick above her head, who is not looking at the figure with the basket. Another woman, with head missing, is standing behind them.

Maiuri (1955:95; 1961:102) states that the kneeling woman is holding her hands above a basket containing a phallus, which is a symbol of fecundity and that the winged figure has appeared with a raised *flagellum* for chastisement. In agreement with Maiuri, Grant (1979:147) maintains that the kneeling woman is unveiling an enormous phallus,³⁹ but adds that it is intended to ward off Nemesis⁴⁰, the goddess of retribution, who is portrayed as the winged woman behind her.

³⁹ The culmination of the ceremony was the unveiling of the phallus in a winnowing basket. It was a symbol of life over death. Finally, symbols or passwords were imparted to the initiate to assist her in overcoming obstacles to eternal happiness and to ward off demons. After receiving amulets or similar items to commemorate the initiation, all participants proceeded to drink copious amounts of wine, to eat raw meat and to dance wildly against a background of music made by panpipes, cymbals, castanets and timbrels (Turcan 1995: 309-311).

⁴⁰ Nemesis was the instrument of divine vengeance. She fought against excess, arrogance and everything that destroyed balance. Nemesis demanded moderation in all things. The image of a reflection of oneself would at least evoke a feeling in the onlooker in ancient Rome of being careful not to expose oneself to excesses, for fear of the vengeance of

Brendel (1980:102) points out that the figure approaching from the left (with head missing due to the volcanic eruption), is carrying an offering plate. All three figures in the group are looking away from the divine couple, possibly unaware of them, meaning that perhaps only the viewer can perceive them?

The author agrees with Maiuri and Grant that the object in the basket is a phallus. Although the Liknon and phallus belong together in a Bacchic ceremony, they also are used in ceremonies dedicated to Ceres or Demeter.⁴¹ Brendel adds that the kneeling girl has a torch on her left shoulder.⁴² He explains that this could mean that the ceremony is being held at night.

There is no doubt that the figure with dark wings is a demonic being (Brendel 1980:107). There have been many artistic representations of such demons, but Brendel proposes that Lyssa fits the image in this frieze better than other suggested names. Lyssa could be described as personifying madness and indomitable passions. She is also reputed to raise Dionysiac madness with her frenzied whipping. No other demon fits this image so closely and is so at home in the Bacchic world. She appears to be ready to strike the girl who is about to unveil the phallus in the basket. Her pose is not menacing and it appears that the blow she is about to make cannot be interpreted as a punishment, as Maiuri had maintained, but rather to transform a natural human being into the state of a maenad. Her soul would become purified and united with the god Dionysus through the whipping (Brendel 1980:113). Benvenuto (1984:xvi) does not believe that the winged being is Lyssa and names her as Aidos,⁴³ the demon of shame. The act of unveiling the phallus is

the divine Nemesis (Goring 1991:136). The scene could have evoked more fantasy as the visitor viewed the mythological imagery.

⁴¹ According to Herodotus (2.59), Isis was known as Demeter in Greece. She was an ancient Egyptian deity who appealed to women as a model of womanhood (Hammer 2000:44). Isis represented maternal constancy (Meyer 1987:6) and became a universal goddess in the ancient world. She was the chief representative of divine femininity (Ferguson 1970:24).

⁴² A torch is usually a chthonic symbol which would point to Demeter.

⁴³ Aidos is associated with Nemesis. This interpretation would agree with that of Grant and would also link to the association of Nemesis with Narcissus as discussed in connection with the previous scene. Encyclopaedia Online

prohibited by the demon, appearing between ecstasy and shame and brandishing her whip. It is not the woman who wishes to flee from the terrible sight, but the demon of shame who is barring her by means of violence from seeing the phallus. This interpretation is opposed by Turcan (1992:309). He is quite clear that flagellation did not take place in Dionysiac initiation rituals. He prefers to explain that the figure is holding the whip as a warning against the punishments of hell. Turcan (1992:309) does, however, agree with Maiuri and Grant that the object in the basket is a phallus based on the knowledge that the unveiling of the phallus is common in Dionysiac iconography, as a revelation to the candidate of life over death. He thinks that death is embodied in the female demon with black wings in this scene. Varone (2001:106) explains that the initiate is now at the point of the ceremony where she will receive the revelation and awareness, as she unveils the phallus. The regenerative power that it possesses will ward off evil forces, here represented by a winged demon with a whip. The demon is ready to strike, but is compelled by the power of the phallus to withdraw – impotent in its presence. The winged figure as portraying the personification of Ignorance is the description given by Seaford (2006:62), which is a precondition for the effectiveness of mystic initiation. After the initiate moves from ignorance to knowledge, Ignorance, who caused the anxiety, must fly off.

Burkert (1987:96) explains that phallus processions were always present in the worship of Dionysus. He states that the phallus was *as common as an ear of grain*, so the mystery was definitely not in the object itself, but in the purification process and change of status, even the identity, of the initiate. As only married women, not virgins, could become *bakchai* in the full sense, the change in status from childhood, puberty, maturity and marriage may well represent the change in status portrayed in the frescoes. They could easily be interpreted as preparations for marriage or a form of Roman Matronalia. Burkert (1987:105) concludes that the encounter with the phallus fits such a perspective.

(2010) links Aidos, the personification of shame, to Nemesis, who represents divine retribution. Aidos warns human beings not to spend their days in warfare or at banquets. They should rather suffer the fatigue and misery of labour. The punishing rod would be an appropriate symbol to confirm this.

A depiction of a phallus would have a totally different connotation to a viewer in ancient Rome than it has to a modern viewer, to whom it would most likely appear erotic. Varone (2001:15) explains that many images of phalli found on street corners, signs and paintings had no erotic meaning whatsoever. The author mentions that phalli found on funerary monuments would represent a vital generative force that would survive the deceased after death. It would show that his individuality would continue after his flesh had decayed. Another possible interpretation in the case of an effigy of Priapus would manifest as an image of the fertility of nature. The god safeguarded the fruits of the garden and warded off thieves. There is also an element of magic attached to a symbol of the phallus, so it would signify superstition rather than eroticism. Amulets were decorated with phalli to ward off 'the evil eye' and were not imbued with an obscene meaning. It was quite common to see images of a phallus in the home, in front of children and guests. Public baths would display the same images representing humans in the flow of nature, represented by the vital element, water. Even if mention were made of the enormous phallus in a more earthly sense, a Roman would be more likely to comment, admire and even tease without the modern erotic meaning (Varone 2001:17-26). The unveiling of the phallus would be the culmination of the initiation ceremony. It would represent an important symbol in female cults to signify the perpetuation of life, of active power and the propagation of cosmic forces (Snow-Smith (2005:110)).

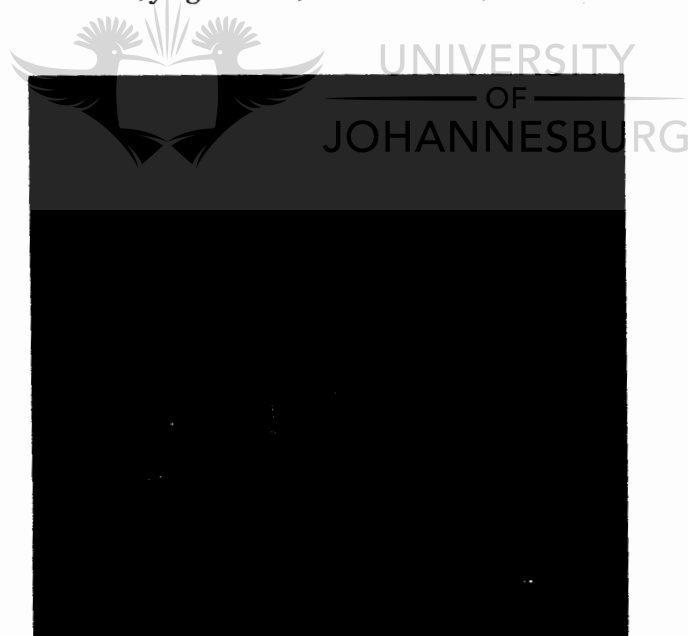
Seaford (no date) relates the unveiling of the phallus to similar features of tribal initiations: sometimes the sacred objects revealed in these initiations were models of genital organs. The models may have been used to instruct the young in the secrets of sexuality and reproduction. The author informs us that in a Bacchic initiation it would be likely for not only a phallus to be in the basket, but also some fruit. With these sexual symbols in the rituals it is easy to see why the authorities were suspicious of sexual abuses occurring in the Bacchic ceremonies. These claims were possibly unfounded.

In conclusion most interpretations agree that the kneeling figure is about to uncover a phallus in a *liknon* whilst a mythological winged being is ready to whip to her. The

reason for this act differs from scholar to scholar, as does the identity of the winged figure. One explanation is that the phallus will ward off Nemesis, the goddess of retribution. Another is that the winged figure is a demon, possibly Lyssa, who is in the process of whipping the kneeling initiate into a mad frenzy, who would then become a maenad. Aidos has also been suggested to identify the figure with the whip. According to some scholars she is preventing the initiate from seeing the phallus. Aidos is also linked to Nemesis, so they could in effect be one and the same.

The reason for the flagellation is still under debate. If Nemesis is intended, then she would probably warn the onlooker against excesses, instilling fear of being punished. Other suggestions are that the demon is forced to withdraw due to the magical power of the phallus, a symbol of fertility and regeneration. It could also mark the culmination point of the initiation ceremony when all is revealed.

Scene F – Semi-naked woman, flagellation, hand on head, woman with long stick, woman dancing



Scene F

On the south wall a semi-naked woman is lying dejected across the lap of another woman, whose hand is resting on her head in a non-aggressive manner. To their right an

intent, tensely focused woman is holding a long stick (thyrsus). A fourth woman is dancing naked beside them while clapping cymbals in the air.

Maiuri (1955:95) describes the scene as the flagellation of the woman being struck by the demon whilst seeking refuge in the lap of her companion. According to him the dancing woman is a Bacchant in origastic exhaltation. Burkert (1987:104) agrees with Maiuri that the scene portrays the flagellation of the girl with closed eyes. Her head is in the lap of a woman who is holding back her garment from her bare back, whilst a sinister figure with black wings is raising a rod to her. This figure is mythological, so is purely symbolic. As the stroke hits the initiate divine madness will take possession of her. Then, once she is a true Bacchant, she will rise up in a frenzied dance as is being shown by the figure to her right. This scene is also referred to as a ritual flagellation, according to Honour & Fleming (1995:156) it is carried out under the gaze of a seated priestess overseeing all of the scenes, who is probably the mistress of the villa.

Flagellation played a part in fertility rites in ancient Rome. During the festival of Lupercalia,⁴⁴ the Luperci (priests) ran through the streets wildly dressed only in a loin cloth whipping passers-by. Some women actively sought to be whipped in the belief that fertility would be assisted. In the late Republic a wife could be divorced for not being able to bear children (Varone 2001:96), so fertility was considered a serious issue. Carcopino (1991:104-105) has interesting information on childless marriages in ancient Rome. He informs us that some Roman women chose not to be mothers for fear of losing

⁴⁴ The Lupercalia was a pre-Roman festival celebrated on 15 February of each year to ward off evil spirits from the city and to release health and fertility. Lupercus was the god of the shepherds, who was also known as Pan. There were further associations: Lupa was the name of the she-wolf that suckled Romulus and Remus (founders of Rome). She suckled them in a cave called the Lupercal. The ceremony began with a sacrifice of two goats and a dog. There were offerings of salt meal cakes prepared by the Vestal Virgins that were burnt in honour of the god. Worshippers, clad only in girdles of goat skin, ran around the city beating women with whips believing that pregnant women would be assisted in delivery and barren women would be aided in becoming fertile (Ogilvie 1969:77). After the sacrifice of the goats and the dog, blood was smeared onto the foreheads of two youths, who were expected to laugh at this point. The knife was then wiped clean with wool that had been dipped in milk. According to Price & Kearns (2003:321) the festival of Lupercalia definitely included fertility magic and purificatory rites, but no interpretation is totally satisfactory.

their looks and that many practiced birth control for various other reasons. As a result there were a good number of childless marriages around the time that the frescoes were painted. It was common for women to almost defy their husbands by not becoming traditional wives and mothers. There was much literature scorning women who were jealously rivaling their men. Would this scene be perceived as a kind of lesson to this kind of woman, perhaps?

These modern (at the time) women were the exception and not the rule. Traditionally Roman women were expected to bear children, even though there were many deaths through childbirth and pregnancy at that time. The infant mortality rate was higher than for pregnant women and almost half of all children died before they were ten years old (Hammer 2000:39). Despite the dangers, women who bore children were held in higher esteem than those who did not. Women paid homage to the gods to increase their fertility and to be assured of good health. There were various ways to call upon the gods for this gift. For example: a woman could follow a simple ritual by using herbs, magic or spells, she could be married among ripe crops or she could take part in a state-sponsored cult ritual to aid her fertility, where the whole community would encourage them. There were many ways in which these fertility rites were enacted, from offerings of sacred cakes to ritual flagellation. This scene could easily represent such a ritual (Hammer 2000:39).

Maiuri (1955:95) explains the dancing woman as a nude Bacchant in the midst of orgiastic ecstasy. Grant (1979:142) has a different opinion: that this scene depicts the birth of the god in a ritual miming. The kneeling woman has her head in the lap of a priestess and she is in the throes of labour. The explanation given by Nappo (1998:156) is that the pleasure is now over, therefore the girl is whipped by a winged demon, whilst two Bacchantes dance to the clash of cymbals. A different interpretation is offered by Seaford (2006:70): that Semele's birth pain for her son Dionysos was enacted each year in the mystery celebrations. If this were the case, the dancing woman would be celebrating the birth with a maenad in the background holding a thyrsus.

Varone (2001:103-104) states that the initiate has reached the decisive point of the rite and is seized with confusion and terror. She tries to withdraw and takes refuge in the lap of her initiatrix, who attempts to comfort and encourage her to complete the rite. This takes place as a nude Bacchant dances with castanets and her companion holds the thyrsus above her head. This rod is a phallic symbol sacred to the god Dionysus.

The flagellation scene is interpreted by Snow-Smith (2005:110-111) as a symbol of psychological blows made to the psyche and not to the actual physical body. As these blows were received, the body would become purified. The dancing figure to the right represents the cleansed spirit, depicted here as a maenad. The naked body of the woman represents purity and chastity, which is her new state after the whipping. It is interesting to note that none of the authors consulted mention the pain that the woman must have endured during whipping. All focus on the spiritual meaning.

If one pursued Brendel's interpretation of the daemon as Lyssa whipping the initiate into a frenzy in order to transform rather than to punish, it would then follow that the girl would become like a maenad in her mind and behaviour. As the girl is lying in the lap of the female figure, her hair is hanging dishevelled around her face, as if she has already become a maenad. She appears to be waking up. Brendel points out that sleep, dreaming and happy awakening are common in ancient depictions of Bacchic activities. Is the image of Lyssa purely allegorical? Did the initiate fall into a deep sleep, dream of the whipping and awaken cleansed? If so, she then would be most likely to raise herself up and dance herself into a state of ecstasy, as is depicted to the right of the image of waking by the woman dancing, naked and holding castanets – again, often used in Bacchic rites, together with drums and cymbals.⁴⁵ Brendel (1980:113) maintains that most of the

⁴⁵ Those who incurred the wrath of Dionysus through lack of respect, according to Robinson & Wilson (1962:89), were driven mad. They either were sent into frenzy or harmed those whom they loved. The ram, dolphin, serpent, tiger, lion, lynx, ox, goat, ass and panther were all sacred to Dionysus. He despised the owl. He was often associated artistically with the rose, ivy, laurel, asphodel and the rose. This god was often portrayed being cared for by his nurses, the Nysa nymphs. He is often semi-naked and although he is masculine, he has the softness and roundness of a woman. Dionysus has many female followers including Maenads, Thyads and Clodones. All ran wildly through the hills and mountains singing and shouting in an intoxicated fury. They even carried snakes, swords and cymbals in their hands. Satyrs were

figures in this scene, the waking woman, the second holding her in her lap and the one behind holding the thyrsus that is common in Bacchic ceremonies, are all human figures and that the dancing figure is a maenad, possibly the initiate herself in her new transformation.⁴⁶

Benvenuto (1984:xvi-xvii) asks why the woman is being whipped? Is it due to her shameful paleness? Is it due to her sterility? The whole scene could be an expression of female suffering similar to the Virgin's Pietà. Perhaps it represents the shame she feels because of her masochistic enjoyment? Out of shame springs a dancing nude woman transformed into a joyfully intoxicated Bacchant, who has been through the mystery of the divine union: the revelation of the phallus and the shameful forbidding.

Seaford (no date) thinks that the winged figure has two possible identities: Aidos (Shame or Modesty) and Agnoia (Ignorance), based on the defensive gesture made by the hand being held up. These deities could embody the emotion of the initiate before the revelation as wanting to turn away or run from the ritual object/s. Seaford prefers Agnoia, as she is a winged figure. When all is revealed she is nowhere, she has taken flight. She must reject the sacred objects. She tortures the initiate. As is usual in tribal initiation, Seaford believes that the terror of the initiand is based on his or her ignorance of what is to come and that the flagellation represents an assimilation of these initiatory ordeals to each other. The terrified ignorance of the initiand is understood as divine flagellation.

To conclude: the reason that the tousled woman is lying in the lap of the other is not clear. Some interpretations state that she is being comforted after flagellation, which is

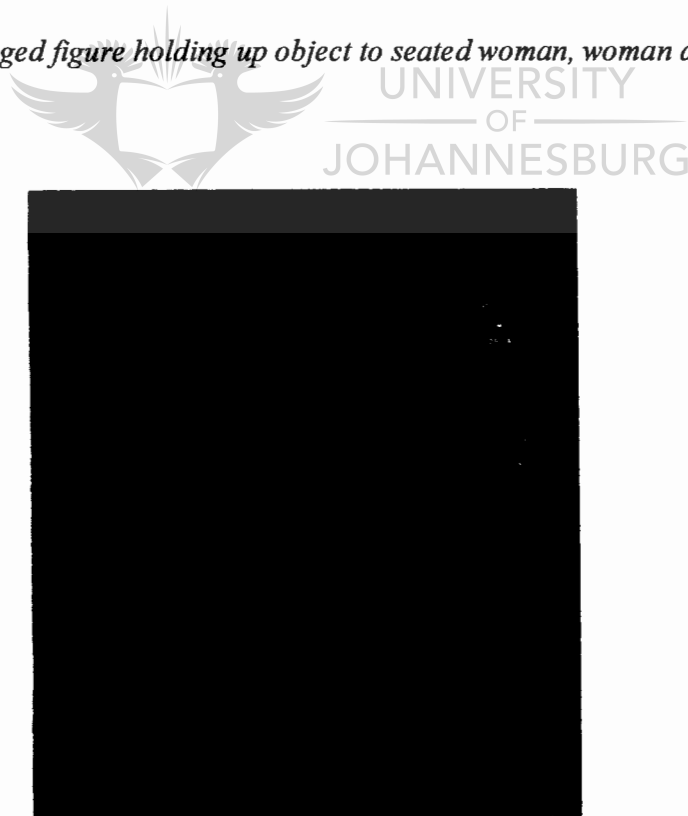
male followers of Dionysus. He was a popular god at this time, believed to bring joy and peace. He also personified the fertility of nature. He was a god who had suffered death and coming back to life. He was the god of wine, who inspired dance, music and drama (Honour & Fleming 1995:156).

⁴⁶ There is a vast amount of literature and art describing the festivals of Dionysus, depicting worshippers in a sacred frenzy. In these festivals various personae were adopted by those who abandoned themselves to the orgiastic cult. They became Maenads, "those who go into a frenzy", Thyades, "the possessed", Clodoni "those who scream" amongst others. Their enactments took place to the sound of cymbals, drums and flutes. Heights of erotic exaltation were reached that we can hardly imagine today in a religious context (Varone 2001:92-93).

part of an initiation rite. The only mystery cult that would practice physical whipping in the ritual process would be the Lupercalia. It has been suggested that it is purely symbolic and represents her ritual cleansing process. If that is the case then flagellation could be relevant to any mystery cult ritual. It could even portray a dream sequence of rebirth of the woman. She would 'wake up' as a maenad after the dream. She has been described as a possible childless woman who has received a beating to help to assist her fertility and even been thought to be in the actual throes of labour in this scene with her head in the lap of a priestess or an initiatrix, who is comforting and assisting her.

The woman behind the main characters is dressed as a Bacchant and carries a thyrsus, that is common in Bacchic ceremonies. The dancing figure with castanets is not so clearly identified. Why she is naked is not clear. She has been described as either dancing to celebrate a birth, in the midst of orgiastic ecstasy, a joyful Bacchant released from shame or as representing a naked newly-cleansed spirit.

Scene G – Small winged figure holding up object to seated woman, woman attending to the former's hair



Scene G

A small winged figure is holding up an object to a seated woman in this scene. It has the picture of a small head resting on its own arm. A standing woman is attending to the seated woman's hair.

Maiuri's (1955:95) explanation of the woman is that she is a bride preparing herself for the initiation ceremony. But there is something different about this scene. The bride is looking at the viewer, whilst an Amor reflects the bride in a mirror as if she were looking at it. This challenges the viewer to respond to the ambivalences and uncertainties in the interpretation of the scene.⁴⁷ This interpretation is opposed by Grant (1979:147). He does not agree that the figure combing her hair is a bride, but maintains that she is Aphrodite, the goddess of love. An eros is holding her mirror whilst Hera is in the background seething with jealousy, because Zeus had fathered Dionysus through Semele.

Brendel (1980:115-120) is of the same opinion as Maiuri as he describes the next two scenes as 'The Bridal Scenes.' The related scenes represent the dressing and waiting of the bride and would have been immediately recognizable as such to an ancient viewer. The first picture shows the bride having her hair separated into strands, which would be necessary to begin the bridal coiffure; six strands are used according to traditional Roman wedding ritual. The small Eros is holding up a mirror for her to see her reflection. Brendel mentions that a mirror could simply mean a reflection or could even possibly imply that the whole scene is a charade that is being acted out. He offers no attempt at a final conclusion. Benvenuto (1984:xvii) also interprets this scene as a representation of the nuptial dressing of the initiate preparing for the symbolic marriage with the god. Her voluptuous face portrays post-ecstatic serenity following important events.

According to Hammer (2000:38) the bridal toilette was part of an elaborate ritual to prepare the bride for marriage. The specific coiffure and bridal clothes were considered important in order to avoid ill fortune. After the ceremony the bride would be escorted to

⁴⁷ This scene also raises the question of the gaze within the decoration of the room with the paintings Elsner (2007:89).

her new home by a procession. The bride was lifted over the threshold after which the new bride would make offerings to her husband's household gods.

After the whipping scene these following scenes appear very calm. The emotional climax of the story has been reached is the explanation offered by Snow-Smith (2005:111) . The embracing figures of Dionysus and Ariadne of the earlier scene represent the intimate association between the initiate and the god. This is shown by the two final bridal scenes in which the bride has been raised up by the god and become exalted. Snow-Smith relates this symbolic pagan union to the later Christian rite of 'marriage' of Jesus with a nun, who, after her sacred vows, becomes a 'Bride of Christ.'⁴⁸

In conclusion it has been suggested that the seated woman is either a real bride or a bride about to be 'married' to a god in a mystery cult ritual, whilst an attendant (possibly Aphrodite) is preparing her bridal coiffure. The small figure holding the mirror has been named as an Eros or Cupid. He is holding a mirror for her to see her reflection during her toilette. It is a possibility that the mirror has a further meaning: that the whole scene is a reflection, or charade.



⁴⁸ Once initiated, the new Bacchant participated in the thiasus (the particular group to which (the initiate belonged) and followed a kind of divine life. There were a number of grades that the new initiate would move through in the hierarchy of the cult. Various levels of priesthood, the use of titles or personifying characters in the acting out of the myth (for example: Silenos, Bacchus' nurse, the Titans or even demons) would be allowed as they progressed through the grades. The celebrations could easily resemble masquerades or carnivals with the members of the cult acting out these character types. There was no strict rule or order that was followed and the ceremonial activities varied from group to group, some being more mystical, others more ceremonially orientated (Turcan 1995:311-312).

Scene H – Small winged figure looking upward with crossed legs



Scene H

In this scene a small winged figure rests his head in his hands in a nonchalant manner. With legs crossed, he is looking up at the woman.⁴⁹ This small Eros (as does the second Eros) displays a mood that is called Pothos, who represents intense longing for love. He is looking pensively at the waiting bride.

This second Eros, or Cupid, could represent a longing for love as the bride awaits her husband (god or human). Cupid is a constant companion of the goddess Venus.

⁴⁹ Brendel (1980:119) names her as the owner of the house.

Scene I – Pensive woman wearing ring



Scene I

This scene portrays a woman sitting looking to her right and lost in her own thoughts. She wears a ring on the third finger of her left hand and a bracelet on her left wrist.

It was suggested by Maiuri (1955:95) that the woman was already married and a priestess of the god, and that perhaps that the picture was a portrait of the *domina* of the house, who commissioned the painting. Brendel (1980:119) also describes the woman as an awaiting bride seated on her bridal bed, who is portrayed with all of the symbols of her newly-acquired status as *matrona*. Her wedding ring is clearly visible and the *tabellae* (marriage contract) are lying next to her. She is displaying her new rank.⁵⁰ She does not

⁵⁰ Roman women, even though they had reached levels of importance, had little real power and certainly political power was attained only through men. The primary purpose of a Roman woman's life was to marry and produce children. Marriage ceremonies represented a contract between two families, but were accompanied by ceremonies and

appear to be a timid bride. Brendel explains that as *Domina* she would be identified as a woman belonging to a social class with special obligations and privileges. Her luxurious clothing confirms this. She is now in an elevated social position that she will enjoy for the rest of her life (Brendel 1980:120).

Benvenuto (1984:xiv) explains that often a *Domina* would be a priestess and initiate to her own children. In this first scene the *Matrona* is both spectator and director of the play. The veiled woman then enters the next scene where the child reads to the woman as described in Scene A above.

The seated woman fulfils more than one image, according to Varone (2001:106). She is an initiate, priestess and *matrona* simultaneously. She appears mystically absorbed, pondering the moments she has experienced to reach this position. Seaford (no date) finds that the intriguing woman elicits many thoughts in the viewer as she is seated on the marriage bed. Who is she? She could either be the initiate herself or even her mother. She does appear a little older than the other pictures of the initiate. Perhaps she represents the final stage of the transition of the girl into matronhood? She sits alone in this scene with a calm and thoughtful gaze directed to the flagellation scene. She has endured the ordeal of the initiation and emerged strong, calm and reborn. Her whole posture is serene.⁵¹

Benvenuto (1984:xiv) begins to read the scenes from the left as she enters the room. The first scene would then be the *Domina*. It would not be the last as many others interpret it. Nappo (1998:154-156) agrees with Benvenuto and also maintains that this scene is the first in the series. He describes this figure as a girl waiting pensively to be initiated. This

rituals. First there was a betrothal ceremony, *sponsalia*, when the woman received an iron ring to wear on the ring finger of her left hand. The positioning of the ring was due to the belief that this finger had a nerve that ran directly to the heart. A girl could be as young as twelve when she was betrothed (Hammer 2000:38).

⁵¹ Varone (2001:98) argues that these powerful images suggest a dream dimension in which the protagonist is the seated matron, bride and priestess of the cult, who is meditating on the development of the scenes. Varone continues to explain that the ritual is associated with the initiation of the woman into the mysteries of the god through knowledge of the phallus.

does not seem logical, however, as this calm, fully dressed bridal figure seems to have reached a point of satisfaction and serenity.

This seated woman is dressed as and has attributes of a bride. She has been named as Domina, Matrona, spouse, priestess, initiate or mother. Perhaps elements of more than one are present? Each account by the cited scholars informs the reader that she is serene, peaceful and calm in her new bridal state. She has reached her desired position, in religion, marriage or status. The scene appears to be the final one.

The frieze as a whole

The paintings in the Villa of the Mysteries would have been meant to transmit a message or impression to the onlooker. The kind of message, however, is not clear. Different scholars have come to various conclusions based on their observations as mentioned in the above description of the individual scenes and interpretations. These interpretations are quite diverse. A depiction of a mystery cult ritual is a common belief, but which god is represented overall is unknown. Dionysus is the most popular, however Ceres, Liber, Libera, Demeter, Kore, even Venus have been debated as the prominent deity⁵². A blend of gods has also been suggested. Perhaps marriage could be depicted in the scenes? Either to a god, or to a human. Fertility has been put forward as a solution to the overall meaning of the frescoes. It could even be a warning against unacceptable female behaviour. Some scholars believe that the whole scene simply represents a play or a dream sequence, possibly a soul's journey as depicted in ancient Etruscan tombs. The paintings have been interpreted as keys to unlock a speech hidden in the memory of the home owner or to represent the writings of Catullus. The gazes of the characters, objects and ideas would 'point' the orator in the direction of his next sentence. Could the scenes represent a play or *dromena*? One interpretation suggests that the painting could have

⁵² The initiation ceremonies into the various Greek mysteries resemble each other, no matter which god: Isis, Liber, Dionysus, Ceres or any other. The most important aspect of the initiation ceremony was the ritual, not the actual deity. He or she was of secondary importance to the initiate and his or her purification process, who was the main focus (Turcan 1995:311-312).

been created on the walls of a brothel. One thing, however, is clear: that no interpretation is wholly conclusive.

Before interpretations of the meaning of the frescoes by the various scholars are investigated, it is important to mention three points. Firstly, on the wall immediately outside the room with the frieze is a picture of a young satyr. The naked figure is grinning. His arm and leg are raised in a kind of dance. He faces a drunken Silenos and a muse or priestess on the opposite walls of this adjoining room. These paintings are a kind of introduction to Room 5. Many of the images painted on the walls of this room could easily be associated with the god Dionysus. They appear to set the scene for visitors who enter the room with the great frieze (Grant 1979:142). Secondly, Kirk (2000:106) maintains that a modern viewer may look for a clear-cut interpretation based on either myth or reality. Ancient viewers did not have our modern boundaries. There was a blur between the two worlds. Gods and humans did not inhabit separate worlds. Each had characteristics of the other. Seaford (2006:72) raises the third point that it is important to bear in mind that in the ancient world most rituals were generally associated with myths. With the above in mind, a selection of different interpretations of the overall meaning of the frescoes follows:

According to Maiuri (1955:93), the paintings represent the initiation of brides into the cult of Dionysus (painted next to the nuptial chamber). He presumes that they are the work of an artist from Campania and were executed in the middle of the first century BCE and that they were inspired by the mistress of the house, who was an initiate and priestess of Dionysus. The 29 human and divine figures of the composition are grouped together to illustrate scenes from the sacred rites. Grant (1979:146) also maintains that the Dionysus-Bacchus myth is the theme of the overall work, but that the actual rites would have been performed in secret⁵³ and that they would have always remained secret.

⁵³ Although Dionysiac rituals were often performed outdoors in public. According to Seaford (2006:46) there were also some rituals performed in secret. One secret ritual was performed by a small group of women enacting the Anthesteria, festival held in honour of Dionysus, where the wife of the 'king' magistrate was given in marriage to Dionysus (who was sometimes represented by a mask). His companions would probably be satyrs, playing pan pipes, maenads or nymphs in costume. Many of the images in the frieze could confirm this notion.

Grant concludes that some kind of mimed satire must be depicted, as esoteric rites of the cult would not have been revealed to the uninitiated. One of the reasons that Grant (1979:144) offers for the view that the frescoes in Room 5 allude to Dionysus, is that the owner of the house would be likely to honour the god of wine, to whom he owed most of his wealth.

Brendel agrees that the central figures are probably Dionysus and Ariadne who appear as a kind of cult image to dominate the room. The overall ethos of the scene is romantic love and would therefore fit the image. Perhaps the scene was a copy of a Hellenistic painting and inserted without any other meaning except mood and fashion? Or were they intended to represent a dominant deity? Brendel continues to explain that cults of Ceres, Liber and Libera were also common. These cults had a certain amount of social exclusiveness. The matrons were recruited from leading classes who met in a closed society. During the ceremony that lasted one night, they met as women with men excluded from the ritual. Brendel establishes a link between the cult of Ceres and the frieze in the Villa of the Mysteries. Many leading ladies at the time when the paintings were executed attached great importance to being perceived as priestesses of Ceres. Brendel (1980:126) explains an association in classical Greece between Demeter and Dionysus that may have been intended in the frieze. Old religions often built one on top of the other, but there is not enough iconography in the images to link them with Ceres, Liber or Libera with certainty. There is definitely some Bacchic imagery. The picture of the central figures is confusing if this is the case; if Dionysus were the important god, why then is the female character physically higher? This woman who holds the most elevated position. Many examples of ancient art show the most important figure as larger and positioned higher than those less important. Already in 1980 Brendel (1980:129) posed some questions: Does a real wedding take place here? Or is it symbolic? Did the scenes represent a 'rite of passage' designed to transfer a woman from one state to another? Wedding rites detach a bride from her old family and life and attach her to a new one, much in the same way as an initiate into a mystery cult would be detached from her old self and be attached to the new group of worshippers. The overall question would then be: Do the scenes represent a

marriage with scenes of a cult initiation to support it? Or do they represent a cult initiation with scenes of a marriage to support it? Brendel (1980:120) points out that the connection between the bridal pictures and the other scenes is unclear. Although Dionysus was not considered an appropriate model for the matrimonial institution, we can see that all the figures are female and that some sort of women's cult is definitely depicted, which is Dionysiac in character.

The suggestion that a triad of gods is possibly represented has been proposed (Brendel 1980:127). There are too many inconsistencies for only one to be depicted. The goddess occupies the highest throne. But Brendel prefers to think that she could be Ceres, not Venus. There are links to the cults of Liber, Libera through imagery (bread, wine, pastoral), together with the bridal scenes and there are also many illustrations alluding to the Bacchic mysteries. But this scholar points out that the link between depictions of an initiate into a cult becoming a maenad and scenes of marriage is not there. They do not belong to the same world.

In agreement with Maiuri, Grant and Brendel, Burkert (1987:95) maintains that Dionysus is most likely to be the god who is central to the theme. This is based on his belief that the woman who enters from the left proceeds through purification and the enactment of a satiric life to the mysterious revelation of Dionysus on the central wall.

Clarke (1991:10) proposes that the central godly pair give the impression of Bacchic intoxication. Dionysus, however, ignores the viewer and looks at the face of his lover. It is interesting that the viewer is the spectator in some of the scenes whereas in others the viewer becomes part of the scene, by being viewed in others. Clarke (1991:99) also points out that the central figures of Ariadne (again his interpretation but not only his) and Dionysus are also tailor-made for the space they occupy. The paintings were designed to fit the architectural space. Similarly the startled woman and Silenos with satyrs, the winged flagellator and her victim (his interpretation) and the bride at her toilet with the cupid all fit perfectly into the area to be decorated. If this is the case, then interpreting the meaning of the frieze from the layout would be an almost impossible

task. Clarke (1991:104-105) suggests that the most likely interpretation is that the scenes represented part of semipublic pageants or tableaux representing the festivals of Dionysus. The symbols of wine, mask and the phallus on either side of the divine couple are sacred symbols of Dionysus' divine power. The representations of women in bridal costumes relate this realm of Dionysus to his female devotees and marriage. He also points out that images in these scenes were common in other media throughout the ancient world, therefore fashion should be taken into consideration. The cult of Dionysus was introduced from the Near East to Greece and Italy, as were other similar cults in the two centuries BCE (Honour & Fleming 1995:156). The paintings in the Villa of the Mysteries date to around 50 BCE, therefore would have been influential to the owner at the time. It may simply have been fashionable to follow the current Emperor's taste⁵⁴.

Although the meaning of the scenes is in dispute, scholars generally agree that the scenes represent a novice being initiated into a cult. The ceremony depicted is an important record of the gradual transformation of the Roman religion to incorporate Oriental spiritualism, which had been developing over some time, as the state religion ceased to fulfil the deeper spiritual needs of people. It must be mentioned that Roman domestic religion was not standardized. Each household preferred to worship its own gods. Once certain gods were chosen there would usually be small statuettes on or around the shrines. The most popular were the *Lares*, *Genius* and *Penates*. Bacchus/Liber was also popular because of his role in fertility and well-being. The gods were often venerated in the Campanian region because of the many vineyards that families were dependent on for their welfare (Swetnam-Burland 2000:65). The domestic shrines in the Villa of the Mysteries offer no confirmation that Bacchus/Liber was one of the household gods. There is possible evidence of Ceres based on a piece of tile that is inscribed, but nothing to prove that Bacchus/Liber was worshipped (Swetnam-Burland 2000:68-9).

⁵⁴ Turcan (1992:307) tells of Caesar's political heir, Mark Anthony, entering Ephesus behind a procession of Bacchantes, Pans and Satyrs, so this idea is plausible. Caesar was known to be pro the cult of Dionysus as were other Emperors.

Honour & Fleming (1995:156) point out that there is no representation of the intoxicated, orgiastic frenzy that appears on Greek vases. Both gods and mortals appear calm and collected, apart from one terrified figure. The fact that there is a distinct lack of images of wine in the frieze in the Villa of the Mysteries is also commented on by Wilburn (2000:56). There is no way of knowing whether the vessels depicted carry water or wine, or whether the scenes depict an orgiastic rite and drunkenness. There are certainly no images of grapes, which are commonly present in Dionysiac imagery. Other clues need to be sought to confirm whether or not the frescoes depict Dionysus. He was not only the god of wine, however, but also the patron of theatre. Dionysiac festivals were associated with the theatre. Comedies and tragedies were performed in honour of the deity. There could have been a perceived similarity between a drunken person assuming a new character and an actor donning a theatrical mask. There are some images that are particularly theatrical in these scenes. Dionysus was also prominent in *symposia* – drinking parties held at the homes of upper class men in order to discuss art, literature and other fashionable topics (Wilburn 2000:51). This would be apt, if the room was intended for entertaining and banqueting. If, according to many interpretations, the paintings were intended for an audience of initiates into a mystery cult, then they were more likely to be women, not men, as cult members were usually married women. Would it then be possible that it is not Ariadne who is portrayed with Dionysus, but his mother Semele? In that case the married woman joining the cult would not be a new bride, but more likely a mother aspiring to be a strong *domina*, matron and possibly priestess.⁵⁵ No matter who the woman in the central scene is, there is a very strong overtone of femininity to the frescoes.⁵⁶ There appears to be much emphasis on marriage in the paintings, thus Kirk (2000:99) singles out the individual scenes that pertain to marriage. She focuses her attention on four vignettes: the adornment of the bride; the woman folding the ‘nuptial’ peplos; the seated matron and the central couple. Kirk believes that a nuptial interpretation of the scenes is the most compelling.

⁵⁵ Benvenuto (1984:xvii) proposes that the villa was perhaps a brothel (suggested by a guide!) and the Domina was its mistress. She explains that it is possible based on the sexual images that do not differ much from sacred ones.

⁵⁶ It is also interesting that a statue of Livia, wife of the Emperor Augustus, was found in the garden (Brendel 1980:128). This reinforces the feminine influence in the home.

Another view of the identity of the godly pair converts Dionysus and Ariadne into Roman versions. Longfellow (2000:116-128) offers the explanation that the character is Venus, based on her dominant position at the top of the frieze and central placing. Her partner is not Dionysus, but Liber. Longfellow bases her prognosis on the wealth of imagery throughout the Villa: acanthus calyces emitting ivy clusters, pomegranates, rabbits, dogs, birds, butterflies, grasshoppers and lizards. Birds and butterflies are associated with Liber, rabbits with Venus, by virtue of their link with sexuality and procreation. Cupids represent Venus and many implements represent the cult of Liber: wine vessels; tympana; double flutes and torches. This vegetal frieze culminates above the head of the divine couple indicating that the figure is Venus with the head of Liber in her lap. Venus is often linked to bridal toilette and the adornment scenes could show this. Venus, however, is usually depicted naked. This female figure is fully clothed and is not typical of the Venus represented in art. The cupids alone would not provide conclusive evidence that this is the goddess in the frieze. More evidence would be needed. Longfellow (2000:121) finds further imagery to confirm her hypothesis that Venus is the goddess portrayed in Room 4, leading into Room 5. She points out pictures of Liber leaning on a satyr; a dancing satyr; a dancing maenad; Silenos and a woman who may be a priestess. Most of these figures allude to Liber, a few to Venus. As Venus Pompeiana was the patroness of Pompeii, it would be fitting for the goddess to be portrayed in a house in the city. As the house-owners produced wine it would be even more appropriate for them to have paintings of Venus and Liber (Longfellow 2000:126). There was some overlap in depictions of gods and the line between images of Liber and Dionysus. These boundaries were often crossed in ancient art.

Reading the frieze should take into consideration the fact that the Roman house was partly articulated through a complex orchestration of the view, according to Elsner (2007:88) maintains. Rooms were created and decorated with a purpose, envisaging

particular viewing positions and vistas from the outset.⁵⁷ Houses were not only structured in a way that the view was directed to areas of greater public access or privacy, but the view also assisted orators to memorise their speeches by using remembered views within the house (among other things). Thus the speaker was assisted, as he progressed through his house delivering his oration, by the images and symbols which served to remind him of the subject of his speech. Key words or even a whole sentence could be memorised in this way (Elsner 1995:77).⁵⁸

Elsner takes this idea a step further by explaining that the paintings were executed exactly at the same time as Catullus was writing in Rome. The frieze thematically aligns with Catullus' mini-epic (poem 64).

If it is accepted that the scenes have something to do with bridal initiation into marriage, then Elsner believes that the scene at the centre of the east wall depicts Dionysus and Ariadne enthroned together (Elsner (2007:88).

The painting in the Etruscan Tomb of the Leopards is used by Snow-Smith (2005:103) to illustrate a similarity of meaning in the frieze in the Villa of the Mysteries. The Etruscans believed that a person's spirit survived after death. After the funeral procession, mourners shared a banquet with the deceased in the tomb before closing the door as they left. The walls of the tomb were decorated with scenes of the banquet so that the spirit could continue with the dancing, feasting and drinking in his or her afterlife. The paintings were a substitute for real space and opened up a world to the spirit to live it. The viewer, and the spirit being, became part of the celestial feast. The frescoes in the Villa of the Mysteries are laid out in a similar way to the tomb paintings, showing a scene of

⁵⁷ Honour & Fleming (1995:156) maintain that some sort of initiation is depicted. They base this on the impression that anyone who enters the room has the feeling that they have intruded into a religious ceremony and that they are interrupting a solemn ritual. But the god to whom the ritual refers is not certain.

⁵⁸ Seaford (no date) divides the scenes into three parts: scenes A and B are preliminaries to the initiation; scenes DEFG represent the ceremony itself, where the initiate is in the realm of the divine; and finally the adorning of the bride and the marriage bed. The ritual itself would have been performed in three stages in a similar order.

activities with a border top and bottom. Snow-Smith (2005:107) explains these scenes as a representation of the mythic drama of the *dromena*, which she explains is a dream-like vision of the soul, enacted during the initiation ceremony into the cult of Dionysus. This sacred drama is known as the Soul Drama or Journey. The paintings were not intended to actually reveal the holy mysteries to the viewer but were simply a representation of parts of the drama that were allowed to be seen. The ultimate secrets would not have been seen by persons who were not second state initiates, who were vowed to secrecy regarding their ceremonies for fear of punishment in both this world and the next. Twenty-five years earlier Brendel (1980:91), on the other hand, had stated that *nothing in the architectural design points at a secret to be guarded*.

The psychoanalytic process and how it relates to other practices is questioned by Benvenuto (1994:x). She looks to the present and the past. The author finds a common denominator in the practices of love: love for knowledge in philosophy; God's love in mysticism and the transference of love in psychoanalysis. Benvenuto finds the unveiling of the phallus depicted in the frescoes in the Villa of the Mysteries to illustrate well the analytical progression. It is revealing and evocative at the same time. Both psychoanalytical rites and mystic rites have the same base. They are about accomplishing one's own destiny through a process of undressing and unveiling, of dejection and resurrection. This is typical of all rites of passage. Benvenuto (1994:x-xi) emphasizes that rites of passage are common in many cultures in order to integrate the initiate into the new symbolic world. These rites of passage not only apply in a religious context, but also in other social progressions (qualifications, promotions etc). The rite of passage applicable to psychoanalysis is the Oedipal myth and its range of possible and impossible solutions. Benvenuto explains that the relationship between knowledge and love, together with passion and madness are all integrated into any unveiling rite. She continues to point out that the Dionysiac rites epitomize the struggle between sacred and profane love as a symbolic initiation into womanhood and feminine sexuality. There is a constant battle that a woman has between her own image as an erotic sexual being and as a wife and mother. Oedipus could find a solution in castration, he has this choice open to him, but this would not work for a woman, so she remains in a permanent state of non-

accomplishment of her rite of passage. This impossible situation causes women to be in a perpetual state of hysteria. The scene where the initiate is unveiling the phallus echoes this dual problem. It is never fully achieved. The phallus should remain modestly veiled; if not, the demon of shame awaits with her punishment.

Seaford (no date) explains the Greek mysteries as developing from tribal initiation. He refers to the frieze as an ancient spiritual document painted on four walls of a smallish room measuring 22ft x 15ft. He notes that our aesthetic response to the paintings will be greatly enhanced by understanding the religious significance of the scenes. He compares the events depicted to tribal initiation, which is common to societies are often referred to as 'primitive.' A typical tribal initiation would follow the following pattern of events: the initiate would undergo seclusion; instruction; purification; beatings; contests; special food; special dress (often animal skins); the revelation of sacred objects; death and rebirth; contact with regenerative natural powers; and finally marriage or the first act of sexual union. All of these activities are kept secret except from those who are already initiated. This process is a fundamental part of tribal culture. Novices die as children and are reborn into adulthood, they learn the myths and ritual peculiar to the tribe, they pass for being ignorant to knowing all – they acquire knowledge of the mysteries of the tribe. This initiation process is central to tribal life.

From the exposition above it can be concluded that the sequence in which the scenes should be read is under debate. Some scholars prefer to read from left to right (starting with the reading of the text and ending with the seated woman, as described above), while others believe that the right-hand frieze and the left-hand frieze are separate, overseen by the picture of the god lying in the lap of the woman or goddess in the centre. Another interpretation maintains that the gazes of the characters are important to lead the onlooker from scene to scene.

What the scenes represent is also not clear. There are various interpretations as to their meaning, including a marriage rite or preparation for marriage, a fertility rite and the representation of a drama. A depiction of a mystery cult ritual is a common suggestion,

but in honour of which god? Although Dionysus is the most popular candidate, Ceres, Liber, Libera, Demeter, Kore, Venus and even a blend of gods are all possibilities. No interpretation is conclusive.

The overarching consensus, however, is that some kind of female rite of passage is depicted, either in real terms or symbolic. The reading of a rite, unveiling of the mysterious, death, cleansing, rebirth and ultimate peace prevail.

Analysis/discussion

This second part of the chapter will segment the scenes in the frescoes in a different way to Gazda (2000a:3). In ancient art (Trajan's Column, for example) scenes are often separated by the direction in which the characters are looking. If two characters are back to back, it would mean that they do not belong to the same scene. If characters face each other, then they are part of the same scene. This, I submit, makes the matter of segmenting scenes easier. Scene 1 remains unchanged as the figures do 'look inwards', but many of the other scenes change, making their interpretation slightly different. In order to explain this more fully, 10 tables follow the final chapter, listing a) the characters which make up the individual scenes, b) itemized descriptions of the characters and c) objects in the scenes. This information will be investigated to draw inter- and intra-textual conclusions as to the meaning of the frescoes. It will then incorporate conclusions from Chapter 3, Part 1 in order to re-assess who the characters and persons are, what they refer to, what the objects refer to and how they relate to each other.

The scenes in the tables are made up as follows:

Scene 1: Entrance scene - Standing woman, standing child reading, seated woman, woman with tray

Scene 2: Libation scene - Woman leaning, seated woman/priestess, woman pouring liquid

Scene 3: Pastoral scene - Silenos playing lyre, seated male with pipes, seated female suckling

Scene 4: Prophetic scene - Startled woman, seated Silenos, young male, young male with mask

Scene 5: Love scene - Man lying in lap of seated woman

Scene 6: Unveiling scene - Kneeling woman, standing woman, standing woman

Scene 7: Flagellation scene - Winged woman, kneeling woman, seated woman, woman with thyrsus

Scene 8: Dancing scene - Dancing woman

Scene 9: Preparation for marriage scene - Small winged figure, standing woman, seated woman (bride)

Scene 10: Bridal scene - Seated woman, small winged figure

Scene 1 - Entrance scene

Figure 1 appears to be entering the scene from outdoors, as she has her head semi-covered (discussed in Chapter 3, Part 1, scene A). Her hair is worn in a mass of curls in front, which was fashionable in the first century BCE. This style required a servant to manipulate the curling iron (Guhl & Kohner 1994:489), therefore she is probably an elite woman. Her dress of white and purple would echo this, as servants would usually have clothing that was not dyed one of these colours. Their clothing would be more likely to be beige or brown. Guhl & Kohner (1994:485) explain that only slaves and poor people wore natural coloured clothing. Her pose is unusual and she is holding her dress out in front of her in an odd way. Would this possibly indicate that she is pregnant? Figure 4 to the right holding a tray, looking slightly backwards, also has a distended belly and may be pregnant. She could also be the same person as in Figure 1, who has entered and is now in the process of carrying an offering towards scene 2. If it is not the same person, then these two possible pregnancies could reinforce the fertility imagery.

The identity of the seated woman (Figure 3) is uncertain. She does have a dress that is partly white and her hair appears to be tied back neatly. She could easily be a high-class person. She is also seated elegantly with her legs crossed and is holding a scroll.

Figure 2 is a male, standing child. He has short-cropped hair (similar to other mythological beings in the frescoes) and is wearing small golden boots. This kind of footwear appears to be godlike (also repeated on the mythological winged figure with whip in scene 7). The boy is also naked. Both observations could point to the fact that the child is not a human child, but a young god, possibly Dionysus. Grant's hypothesis (1979:146) is that Figure 2 is Dionysus as a child reading his rites before his mother Semele. The boots and the dishevelled hair would make this notion feasible.

It is interesting to note that the seated posture of Figure 3 is the same as that of Silenos (Figure 3, scene 4), Ariadne (or other woman) (Figure 2, scene 5) and the seated woman, holding the flagellated woman in her lap (Figure 3, scene 7). Each of these characters have their legs crossed one in front of the other. Silenos and Ariadne are mythological figures. If this scene intends Semele to be portrayed, then she would also be mythological. Perhaps the seated woman in scene 7 is too? The fact these two figures look similar make it a possibility that they are similarly mythological.

Figure 4 is wearing a white dress and purple cloth over it. This would indicate a high-born woman, not a servant. She is carrying an offering plate with bread and (carrying) twig/s or stick/s that could be ears of corn. These gifts could be offered to Ceres/Demeter or Dionysus in a ritual. This walking figure has laurel or olive leaves in her hair. Coupled with the pregnant state and the harvest items on the offering plate, fertility would be a possible meaning, in which case the leaves would most likely be olive. Other characters with olive wreaths on their heads are: Figure 2, scene 2 (possible priestess/woman in libation scene) and Figure 3, scene 2 (woman pouring libation onto offering plate). Both of these images are concerned with offerings to a god in a ritual. Other images of leaves in the frescoes are not of olive (dealt with in later scenes).

This scene could therefore represent a woman from high society entering from outdoors. Dionysus reading the sacred rites to his mother could be providing a mythological backdrop to the scene. The act of the young god parallels the rites that this initiate reads

in her initiation ritual. She is portrayed to the left in her clothing, ready to give an offering to her god in the next stage of the ceremony.

Scene 2 – Libation scene

Figure 1 appears to be the only servant in the frescoes. She is wearing a beige dress and has her hair pulled back. It has not been styled. Figure 3 to the right, pouring the libation, is dressed in a beautiful purple dress and has a wreath of olive in her hair. She cannot be of low birth. She is seated on a gold and purple stool, which is on a plinth or footstool (footstools are common in temples). The overall appearance is rich, religious and important. The woman with her back to the viewer is the only character with make-up. She has heavy eye-liner, a head covering and a wreath of olive on her head. She could be a priestess. It is a possibility that she is performing a secret fertility rite or other rite. The cloth in her left hand is raised and covering something unseen – the phallus perhaps? The purple cloth is the same colour as the cloth covering the phallus in the basket in scene 6. The iconography is the same.

As mentioned above (page 40) Brendel (1980:93) thought that this is not typical of a usual Bacchic rite, unless it was a different kind of rite that was less common or unseen?

Scene 3 – Pastoral scene

This scene shifts the viewer's attention as Silenos now moves from the libation scene into the next scene. He is part of a complete pastoral scene together with the two pan or satyr figures (note the pointed ears and furry legs of the male figure) and the animals. The three figures make a logical group in their landscape. Silenos did not fit the indoor scene with priestess so aptly.

The two seated figures have short, cropped hair, similar to the hairstyle of the boy reading the ritual in scene 1. All three characters appear to be non-human. This is a mythological backdrop to the ritual. Silenos, satyrs, Pan, Paniscas and the suckling of animals are all elements of Bacchic rituals. There is a mood of fertility in the scene.

Scene 4 – Prophetic scene

Earlier (page 42), Figure 1 was linked together with the two satyr figures in the pastoral scene. This startled woman fits more logically into the new group on page 46 (also refer to table explaining scene 4). She looks shocked, Silenos looks shocked and the two satyrs look in amazement into the bowl and out of the scene – they all fit together. She was out of place in the peaceful landscape of scene 3.

Figure 1 has her purple cloak raised high in the air. She has a meticulous hairstyle and is wearing a very expensive sheer white dress. She has a bangle on her left arm and pretty sandals. According to Guhl & Kohner (1994:493) sandals were worn indoors by upper-class persons. This woman is definitely human. She is looking towards the mask and prophecy bowl of Silenos. She is holding her hand up defensively, as if she is frightened of something or wishing to push it away. Could it be the prophecy?

Figures 2 and 3 have the same cropped, somewhat scruffy, hairstyle as the two satyrs in the pastoral scene and the young god reading the scroll in Scene 1. They are definitely mythological. So far there is a total of five characters with this hairstyle. The cupids in the last two scenes will bring the total to seven. All are young and all are mythological.

Silenos has a garland of ivy in his hair (Dionysus has the same garland in the love scene). This is very common in pictures of Silenos and Dionysus. Silenos had the power of prophecy and was known for his wisdom. The image in the bowl (*kantheros*) is hidden from the viewer (in a similar way that the secret ritual is hidden in Scene 2). Only the young satyr (with pointed ears and cropped hair) can see inside the bowl and he has raised eyebrows – he is amazed at what he sees. Perhaps Silenos has already spoken to the startled woman to tell her what is predicted. The mask appears to be a Silenos mask, if one compares the faces. Would this perhaps signify that the whole scene is a drama? It is uncertain. Figure 4 is not only holding the mask, but he is also mounted on a golden chariot. Is this the chariot of Silenos? All images in this scene confirm Silenos and his power of prophecy.

Scene 5 – Love scene

Figure 1 has attributes of the god Dionysus. He has ivy leaves wound in his hair, he is very effeminate with loose curls and is semi-naked. One sandal is on his foot, the other lies on the floor beside him. His blank stare could indicate that he is intoxicated with either wine or love or both. As there are no images of grapes in any of the scenes, love is the most likely. The thyrsus propped against his chair or throne is a common item used in Bacchic ceremonies. There is another thyrsus in the flagellation scene to echo this.

Figure 2 is a seated woman, the depiction of whom is missing a head. She is cradling the head of Figure 1 in her lap. We can see that she is fully clothed (unlike images of Venus, who is mostly naked, or semi-naked) and that she is holding a ball or similar object in her left hand. She is also an important character as she is physically dominant (higher and larger) in the frescoes as a whole. Ariadne was the wife of Dionysus. According to myth, she led Theseus out of the labyrinth with a ball of wool. A ball would fit into her iconography. Like the priestess in Scene 2, Ariadne has her feet on a footstool, thus adding a religious overtone to the scene. Mauri's (1955:95) understanding that this scene represents the marriage of Dionysus and Ariadne fits. The (opinion) view of Honour & Fleming (1995:156), that the scene symbolizes the eternal bliss of the initiate who is becoming the bride of the god, also seems valid.

Scene 6 – Unveiling scene

The head of Figure 1 is covered by a kind of scarf, similar in colouring to the scarf on the head of the priestess in scene 2. Her white sheer dress and purple cloth are reminiscent of the clothing of the terrified or shocked figure in the prophetic scene. Could this be the same woman? The woman holding the offering tray in Scene 1 has a similar outfit. Are all four figures the same person? One of the women (Figure 2) standing behind her also holds an offering tray.

Unveiling the phallus in a basket occurs in Bacchic and other mystery cult rituals. It is a secret that is revealed to an initiate in an initiation ceremony.

Scene 7 – Flagellation scene

In the exposition above on page 53, Figure 1 (the winged figure) was incorporated into the previous scene. But she is looking towards the figure lying in the lap of the comforting woman, so she seems to fit this scene better. The whip is being held above the dishevelled kneeling woman (Figure 2), whilst she is being comforted by Figure 3 and overseen strictly by Figure 4. The identity of the mythological winged figure is not known. Nemesis, the goddess of retribution has been proposed by Grant (1979:147); Lyssa, the demon, is the choice of Brendel (1980:107); Benvenuto (1984:xvi) called her Aidos, the demon of shame whereas Seaford (2006:62) identified her as the personification of Ignorance. Seaford's interpretation could link effectively to the dancing woman in the following scene. In this scene we see the representation of the ignorance of our initiate. In the next scene she could be dancing free from ignorance. The winged woman and the dancing woman share one identical hairstyle, tied back in a mass of loose curls. Whether ignorance, shame or retribution is intended, the image of the dancing woman appears to portray freedom from the bondage.

The kneeling woman is human. She is being beaten. This would transform the initiate into her new, freed state. The identity of the woman with the olive leaves in her hair and crossed legs is not known. She appears human, but could simply symbolize the state of being held (either in bondage or being protected) controlled carefully throughout the ordeal Figure 4 is human. She has an upper-class coiffure and a dress belonging to a woman of elite status. She is holding the thyrsus in a very precise manner, as if she is making sure that this part of the ceremony is carried out correctly.

Scene 8 – Dancing scene

This woman appears to be human, but could possibly be mythological. She is dancing naked on tip toes. Her hair is identical to that of the mythological winged figure in Scene 7. It is unknown whether she represents the initiate herself in her new freedom or represents this state symbolically. She could just as easily be a Bacchant or Maenad.

Scene 9 – Preparation for marriage scene

This scene is the first of two bridal scenes. In this scene a woman (not a servant because of her clothing and hairstyle) is preparing the bride for marriage by creating the traditional six-strand bridal coiffure. Figure 3 is seated on a throne or beautiful chair in her wedding dress, whilst an Eros or Cupid is holding up a mirror or a picture. The picture is of a Cupid, not of the bride. Perhaps the personification of Love that is in the 'mirror' is what she will become as a bride? This small winged figure adds a symbol of love and longing to the scene.

The bride appears to have bare feet, which is not usual for women, even at home. Could this somehow mean that the initiate has become god-like in her espousement to a god?

Scene 10 – Bridal scene

Figure 1 is now a bride. She has all the attributes of marriage – ring, marriage contract and outfit. Her confidence, peace and serenity are apparent. She has reached her desired state. This is confirmed by the Cupid or Eros looking up at her with intense longing. He also seems quite complacent and satisfied with himself; his bow is slack, having done its work. His glum expression shows no admiration for the victim.

From the above analysis, the identity of the characters, objects, their meanings and the overall interpretation of the frescoes have gained a little more clarity and possible conclusions can be extracted from the data. Although the order in which the scenes should be read has not been clarified, an order has to be chosen to make an attempt at understanding the meanings of the scenes. Therefore for this dissertation I will read them from left to right. The story that follows is by no means conclusive, but it is feasible from the information gathered.

The upper-class woman entering Scene 1 from the right could easily be an initiate, who is about to be initiated into a mystery cult. She is possibly pregnant. Her entrance and initiation rite are confirmed by the supernatural presence of the young god Dionysus

reading his own initiation rite to his mother, Semele. Once the rite has been read, she changes into other clothing and prepares to make an offering to the god.

A servant and a woman of high social status assist a priestess to pour a libation and to prepare for the mysterious secrets of the rite to be revealed. This part of the ceremony is overseen by the spirit presence of Silenos, who is playing his lyre. The harmony of nature, fertility and peace prevail in the pastoral scene.

In Scene 4 the ceremony becomes more intense and serious. A prophetic vision is given by Silenos in his mythological dimension. His satyr companions are shocked and surprised by the prophecy. When Silenos shares his vision to the mind of the initiate she is terrified and she is fearful of the next step in the ritual.

Her goal is shown in Scene 5, so the woman overcomes her fears and intends again to join with her god. She wants to be a bride of Dionysus, like Ariadne. The initiate desperately needs to give herself over to his love in an intoxicated abandon, but the prophecy has shown the truth, she has something to overcome, or to lose, before she is worthy of godly union. The initiate has two things to overcome: 1) she has to unveil the contents of the winnowing basket and face the power of the phallus, and 2) she has to have any wrong thoughts, ignorance or behaviour beaten out of her, or to be cleansed by ritual flagellation to proceed to her desired perfect state. As she did with her own son, Semele holds the initiate in her lap as she undergoes the beating. An experienced Bacchant oversees the process sternly. Once the whipping is complete, the spirit of ignorance emerges dancing in ecstasy to the sound of cymbals. She is free to enter the divine marriage, perfect in spirit. Another Bacchant prepares the bride, whilst Cupid shows her a reflection of himself, personifying the love that she is radiating.

This kind of dance through her real ritual with the images of the spiritual characters overseeing and guiding the whole process in the mythological dimension leads to the final scene which shows the bride of Dionysus, happy, serene, with a legal contract and ring. Cupid reflects her state of longing to be with the god for whom she now waits.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The huge, vibrant Second Style images portrayed in the great fresco in Room 5 of the Villa of the Mysteries were executed with a level of artistic skill that far surpasses other paintings in Pompeii. It can only be assumed that the patron was a wealthy man to be able to afford this excellent craftsman, his team and the costly pigments needed to execute the work. This man built a house to impress both business and private visitors. It had a splendid view over the Bay of Naples and it succeeded in creating an image of an owner who was an honourable Roman citizen of high status. There is sadly little information regarding the identity of the home owner(s). The only evidence that has been brought to light suggests that the latter owner was a member of the Istacidii family. It is not certain whether the family was always wealthy, as there is much evidence of recent wine production in the house, which probably indicated that cultivation of some kind was resorted to in times when money was scarce. When the paintings were originally created, however, money could not have been in short supply.

It is not clear why the home owner(s) created this room or who the visitors, male or female, would have been. From the position of the room in the house it is possible that it was used as a dining or banqueting room, but without the standard dining couches in place, this is uncertain. The room was easily accessible to visitors and therefore it could feasibly have been regularly used for events and gatherings. The magnificent frescoes would probably have been created to impress, so it is more than likely that they were intended to be viewed by guests. Whether the functions attended were religious purposes, for marriage preparation or entertainment is not known. It is certain that any or all of these kinds of functions and rituals could have taken place in this room, but it is not possible to be totally sure which ones (in whole or part) were actually intended. Most cultures tend to blend and adapt rituals and activities to suit their needs. This is clearly illustrated in a Christian church, for example, when Santa Claus arrives during the religious Christmas service with Christmas gifts for the children, or the Easter Bunny hops in with Easter eggs during the Easter service. The Christian ritual at that time adopts

and welcomes a pagan ritual. It is therefore most probable that this room was used for more than one purpose and the religious intention was amended if needed.

The meaning of the paintings is much debated by scholars. Interpretations ranging from a mystery cult initiation, a blend of depicted gods, fertility, marriage, female behaviour and a dramatic representation have all been suggested. The human world and mythological world exist side by side in the paintings, so more than one meaning is possible. The way in which the scenes are separated is also much questioned. By linking the scenes according to the way in which characters face each other, a story unfolds of a woman following a process of initiation. It is only one of many possibilities, but a representation of an initiation into a mystery cult is quite probable.

If the artist was commissioned to depict a representation of one or more of the mystery cults, then many common elements of the traditions and practices of the individual rituals would have been incorporated into the paintings. The different cult religions were separate and yet one, as they overlapped and blended into one another on many levels. All of the mystery religions had their roots in nature and fertility. References to fruit, wine, fertility, abundance, love, health and the assurance of the protection of the chosen god were shared by all. The swearing of a vow of secrecy regarding the revelations experienced at the rituals, which were mostly hidden from public view, was also typically shared by all cults. The primary aim of the ceremonies, however, was the purification process of the initiate.

According to the majority of sources consulted for this dissertation, it seems to be widely agreed that the paintings may portray a ritual marriage of a young elite woman to the god Dionysus. The scenes, according to the sources, begin with a reading to the young woman by a boy, followed by a libation poured by a priestess, and then by a terrifying prophecy. Seeing the image of her marriage to the god (likened to Dionysus' marriage to Ariadne) encourages the initiate to allow the secrets of the phallus to be revealed to her. A ritual flagellation is then depicted (real or symbolic), resulting in the freeing of her

cleansed spirit preparing the young woman to become a bride of Dionysus. She reaches the pinnacle of peace, happiness and serenity in her godly marriage in the final scene.

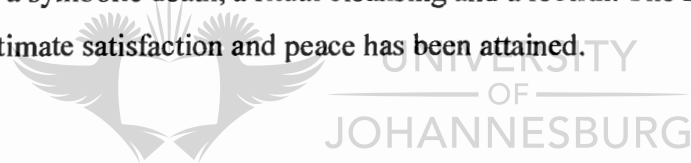
From my personal observations, after segmenting the scenes slightly differently to any of the cited scholars, based on the direction of the gazes of the characters and the tables at the end of Chapter 4, the mythological and human scenes become separate, resulting in 2 sets of pictures of a human story with a mythological story in the background. In effect the deeper spiritual meanings and the real events are shown to the onlooker simultaneously as the woman progresses through the ritual.

Using the new system, the viewer observes an upper-class woman (possibly pregnant) entering Scene 1 from the left, who could easily be an initiate about to be initiated into a mystery cult. Her entrance and her initiation rite are overseen (and thereby blessed) by the supernatural presence of the young god Dionysus reading his own initiation rite to his mother, Semele. Once the rite has been read, the woman changes into other clothing and prepares to make an offering to the god. Next a servant and a woman of high social status assist a priestess to pour a libation and to prepare for the mysterious secrets of the rite to be revealed in the second scene. This part of the ceremony is looked upon by the spirit presence of Silenos, who is playing his lyre. The harmony of nature, fertility and peace prevail in the pastoral Scene 3, giving the impression that all is good at this point.

In Scene 4 the ceremony becomes more intense and serious. A prophetic vision is given by Silenos. His satyr companions are shocked and surprised by the prophecy. When Silenos shares his vision (possibly through the words of the priestess), the initiate is terrified. She is fearful of the next step in the initiation ceremony. However, her goal is shown in Scene 5. This woman intends to join with her god and wants to be a bride of Dionysus, like Ariadne. The initiate desperately needs to give herself over to his love in an intoxicated abandon. But the prophecy has shown the truth: she has something to overcome, or to lose, before she is worthy of godly union. The initiate has two things to overcome: firstly she has to unveil the contents of the winnowing basket and face the power of the phallus. and secondly she has to have any wrong thoughts, ignorance or

behaviour beaten out of her and needs to be cleansed by ritual flagellation to proceed to her desired perfect state. As she did with her own son, Semele holds the initiate in her lap whilst she undergoes the beating. An experienced Bacchant oversees the process sternly until the whipping is complete, then the spirit of ignorance emerges dancing in ecstasy to the sound of cymbals. The young woman is now free to enter the divine marriage, as she is perfect in spirit. Another Bacchant prepares the bride, whilst Cupid shows her a reflection of himself simultaneously, thereby personifying the love that she is radiating. The final scene shows the bride of Dionysus, happy, serene, with a legal contract and ring. Cupid reflects her state of longing to be with the god for whom not only she is waiting, but also has earned the right to wait for.

The overarching consensus, however, is that some kind of female rite of passage is depicted, either in real terms, symbolic terms or a mixture of both. All accounts mutually agree that the frescoes commence with the reading of a rite, followed by the unveiling of the mysterious, then a symbolic death, a ritual cleansing and a rebirth. The final conclusion is that ultimate satisfaction and peace has been attained.



Itemised description of figures and objects		TABLE 10
Marriage scene		
Scene 10	Figure 1 Seated woman	Figure 2 Small winged figure
Figures		
Hair	bridal coiffure	cropped curls
Head	turned to right	turned upwards
Face	looking right	looking at fig 1
Gaze	peaceful - waiting	intense longing
Neck	straight	leaning slightly back
Torso	seated upright	standing upright - leaning slightly
Left arm	resting on arm of chair - ring on 3rd finger - bracelet	holding bow or stick
Right arm	bent at elbow - resting on her chin - bracelet	bent at elbow resting on chin
Legs	straight	right crossed in front of left
Feet	shoes	bare feet
Clothing	bridal dress	naked
Colour	purple and gold	not applicable
Realm	human figure	mythological figure
Gender	female	male
Age Group	young woman	child
Social status	elite	not applicable
Reference	painting	painting
Posture	seated upright	standing upright - leaning slightly
Action	waiting whilst looking to her right	gazing with longing at figure 1
Objects		
Description	scroll	bow
Reference	painting	painting
Realm	human	mythological
Function	marriage contract	to shoot arrow of love ?

Itemised description of figures and objects		TABLE 9	
Preparation for marriage scene			
Scene 9	Figure 1 Small winged figure	Figure 2 Standing woman	Figure 3 Seated woman
Figures			
Hair	short curls	tied back in bun	loose being coiffured
Head	looking upward	tilted downwards	upright
Face	looking upward	looking downwards	looking forwards
Gaze	longing	slightly surprised	looking at viewer of painting
Neck	leaning upward	tilted forwards	straight
Torso	standing upright	standing upright	seated upright
Left arm	holding picture	behind figure 4	holding her hair on top of head - bangles
Right arm	holding picture	holding hair of figure 4	holding separate strand of hair - bangles
Legs	right in front of left	unseen	one foot in front of other
Feet	bare feet	unseen	bare feet
Clothing	naked cloth around waist	dress - cloth around shoulders	decorative dress
Colour	gold	purple	gold with purple
Realm	mythological figure	human figure	human figure
Gender	male	female	female
Age Group	child	young woman	young woman
Social status	not applicable	not known	elite
Reference	painting	painting	painting
Posture	standing upright	standing upright	seated upright
Action	holding picture or mirror up to fig 4	attending to hair of fig 4 - looking at fig 4	having bridal coiffure by figure 3
Objects			
Description	picture or mirror		
Reference	painting		
Realm	mythological		
Function	held up to fig 4 with image of figure 2		

Itemised description of figures and objects		TABLE 8
Dancing scene		
Scene 8	Figure 1 Dancing woman	
Figures		
Hair	tied back loose curls - same as Fig 1 Scene 7	
Head	looking to right	
Face	looking to right	
Gaze	unsure	
Neck	turned to right	
Torso	standing upright - dancing	
Left arm	held above head playing castanets	
Right arm	held above head playing castanets	
Legs	right in front of left moving	
Feet	bare feet - on tip toes	
Clothing	naked - cloth over shoulder - between knees	
Colour	gold	
Realm	human figure	
Gender	female	
Age Group	young woman	
Social status	unknown	
Reference	painting	
Posture	standing upright - dancing	
Action	standing upright - dancing	
Objects		
Description	castanets	
Reference	painting	
Realm	human	
Function	to play while dancing	

Itemised description of figures and objects				TABLE 7
Flagellation scene				
Scene 7	Figure 1 Winged woman	Figure 2 Kneeling Woman	Figure 3 Seated Woman	Figure 4 Woman with Thyrsus
Figures				
Hair	tied back - bun of curls - left parting	loose dishevelled	tied back - leaves (maybe covering)	neat coiffure
Head	leaning back - turned to left	leaning forward	turned to right	leaning forward
Face	looking far left	looking into lap of woman	looking upwards to right	looking at figure 2
Gaze	concerned - worried	serious - forelorn	bewildered - startled - unsure	serious - judgemental - severe
Neck	turned far left	leaning forward	turned to left	leaning forward
Torso	upright leaning back	leaning forward	seated upright	upright
Left arm	held in front in defensive manner	crossed loosely over right arm	on head of figure 2	holding thyrsus
Right arm	held above head holding whip	forearm pointed upwards - hand on head	lifting hair from back of figure 2	holding thyrsus - partly unseen
Legs	left leg in front of right	kneeling	knees apart - feet crossed	unseen
Feet	pointing forward - gold boots	bare	shoes	unseen
Clothing	upper body naked - lower short skirt	naked - cloth around body	loose dress falling from right shoulder	long dress
Colour	gold with purple	purple	white	purple
Realm	mythological	human figure	human figure	human figure
Gender	female	female	female	female
Age Group	young woman	young woman	young woman	young woman
Social status	not applicable	unknown	elite	elite
Reference	painting	painting	painting	painting
Posture	standing upright	leaning forward	seated upright	leaning forward
Action	holding whip ready to strike	lying in lap of Figure 3	holding figure 2 in lap comforting her	holding thyrsus above figure 2
Objects				
Description	whip			thyrsus
Reference	painting			painting
Realm	mythological			human
Function	whip is posed to strike victim			held over head of figure 2

Itemised description of figures and objects		TABLE 6	
Unveilling scene			
Scene 6	Figure 1 Kneeling woman	Figure 2 Standing Woman	Figure 3 Standing Woman
Figures			
Hair	covered with headdress - scarf	unseen	unseen
Head	tilted upwards	unseen	unseen
Face	looking at contents of basket	unseen	unseen
Gaze	calm - peaceful	unseen	unseen
Neck	straight - leaning slightly forward	unseen	unseen
Torso	leaning forward	standing upright	standing upright
Left arm	hand above basket contents - rod over shoulder	holding tray	elbow only seen
Right arm	holding cloth concealing contents of basket	holding tray	unseen
Legs	kneeling on right knee - left knee raised	unseen	unseen
Feet	bare	unseen	unseen
Clothing	sleeveless dress - cloth over hips and legs	dress	dress
Colour	white dress - gold and purple cloth	white	gold
Realm	human figure	unknown	unknown
Gender	female	female	female
Age Group	young woman	unknown	unknown
Social status	elite	unknown	unknown
Reference	painting	painting	painting
Posture	kneeling	standing upright	standing upright
Action	leaning over basket ready to unveil contents	holding tray towards Figure 1	standing behind Figures 1 & 2
Objects			
Description	rod - basket with covered object	tray	
Reference	painting	painting	
Realm	human	unknown	
Function	rod - unknown / basket hiding something to be revealed	holding cakes or bread	

Itemised description of figures and objects		TABLE 5
Love scene		
Scene 5	Figure 1 Man lying	Figure 2 Seated Woman
Figures		
Hair	Loose curls - leaves	unseen
Head	tilted upwards	unseen
Face	looking upwards	unseen
Gaze	intoxicated - blank stare	unseen
Neck	straight - leaning slightly to left	unseen
Torso	leaning across lap of woman	seated
Left arm	across lap of woman forearm points up - hand unseen	holding dark object like ball
Right arm	raised behind head	on shoulder of Figure 1 - bangle
Legs	straddled lazily	crossed
Feet	left foot with sandal - right foot bare with anklet	shoes
Clothing	naked - cloth over lower body	double tunic with cloth over knees
Colour	white	purple and white
Realm	mythological	unknown
Gender	male	female
Age Group	young adult	unknown
Social status	not applicable	unknown
Reference	painting	painting
Posture	lying	seated upright
Action	lying in lap of woman	holding Figure 1 on lap
Objects		
Description	thyrsus	ball in left hand
Reference	painting	painting
Realm	mythological	mythological
Function	balanced on knee of figure 1	held by figure 2

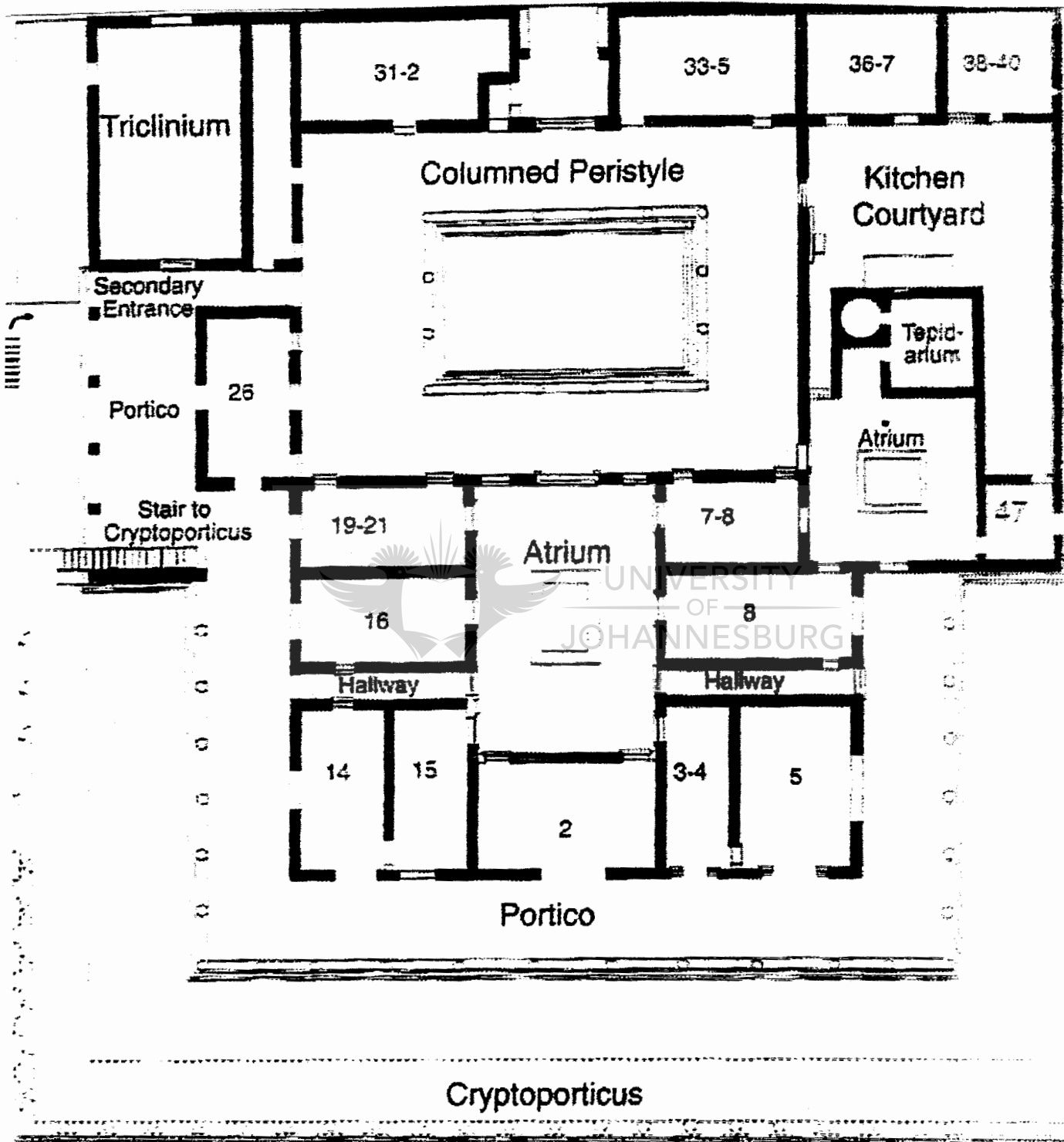
Itemised description of figures and objects				TABLE 4
Prophetic scene				
Scene 4	Figure 1 Standing woman	Figure 2 Seated Silenus	Figure 3 Young male	Figure 4 Young male
Figures				
Hair	tied back - coiffure - half loose	short - balding - grey - leaves	short cropped	short cropped
Head	turned to left	turned to left	leaning forwards - pointed ears	upright - pointed ears
Face	looking to left	looking to right	looking into bowl	looking slightly left
Gaze	startled - apprehensive	serious - slightly shocked	surprise	serious - knowing
Neck	turned to left	turned to left	leaning forwards	straight - slightly left
Torso	upright	seated upright - leaning back	hunched forwards	upright
Left arm	held in defensive gesture - band at top	holding bowl	hand on bowl	hidden behind shield
Right arm	holding cloth above her head	holding bowl - bracelet	unseen	holding mask in air
Legs	standing - set apart	crossed	unseen	unseen
Feet	sandals	boots	unseen	unseen
Clothing	no sleeved dress	naked - cloth over hips and legs	naked cloth over left shoulder	naked
Colour	white - transparent	purple	purple	not applicable
Realm	human figure	mythological	mythological	mythological
Gender	female	male	male	male
Age Group	young	elderley	young	young
Social status	elite	not applicable	not applicable	not applicable
Reference	painting	painting	painting	painting
Posture	standing upright	seated upright - leaning back	leaning over bowl	upright - leaning slightly forward
Action	holding cloth above her head	holding bowl away from himself	looking into bowl	holding mask in air
Objects				
Description		bowl	mask (held by fig 4 above fig 3)	chariot
Reference		painting	painting	painting
Realm		mythological	mythological	mythological
Function		held for figure 3 to look into	held to reflect in bowl - resembles Silenus' face	to transport Silenus

Itemised description of figures and objects		TABLE 3	
Pastoral scene			
Scene 3	Figure 1 Silenus	Figure 2 Seated male	Figure 3 Seated female
Figures			
Hair	cut short - grey - balding	short cropped	short cropped
Head	tilted upwards	tilted downwards - pointed ears	tilted downwards - pointed ears
Face	looking upwards	turned to left	looking downwards
Gaze	lost in thought - relaxed	peaceful - watching female figure	peaceful - absorbed
Neck	tilted upwards	turned to left	tilted downwards
Torso	upright - leaning slightly forwards	upright - seated	seated leaning slightly to right
Left arm	plucking lyre strings	holding pipes	holding breast to suckle kid
Right arm	holding lyre	holding pipes	balancing herself on rock
Legs	left on plinth - right on floor	hairy like animal	bare human - half unseen
Feet	bare	unseen	unseen
Clothing	naked - cloth around legs - over shoulder	tunic - cloth over right shoulder	tunic - cloth over right shoulder
Colour	purple	purple	purple
Realm	mythological	mythological	mythological
Gender	male	male	female
Age Group	elderly	young	young
Social status	not applicable	not applicable	not applicable
Reference	painting	painting	painting
Posture	leaning forwards	relaxed leaning towards female	relaxed leaning towards kid
Action	playing lyre	holding pipes to play	suckling kid
Objects			
Description	9 stringed lyre	pan pipes	
Reference	painting	painting	
Realm	mythological	mythological	
Function	for Silenus to play	for figure 2 to play	

Itemised description of figures and objects			TABLE 2
Libation scene			
Scene 2	Figure 1 Woman leaning	Figure 2 Seated woman	Figure 3 Woman pouring liquid
Figures			
Hair	tied back - pony tail	covered with headdress - leaves	tied back - parting - leaves in hair
Head	slightly lifted	turned to right	leaning forward
Face	leaning forward	looking downwards - wearing make up	looking downwards
Gaze	attentive waiting for order	serious observing pouring	serious looking at what she is doing
Neck	slightly turned to left	turned to right	leaning forward
Torso	leaning over table	seated with back to viewer	standing upright
Left arm	behind cloth	holding cloth secretly	hanging loose - hand unseen
Right arm	holding table	over dish - liquid being poured on hand	pouring liquid from jug onto plate
Legs	together - straight	unseen	unseen
Feet	wearing shoes - half seen	unseen	unseen
Clothing	dress - no sleeves	double tunica tied on left shoulder	no sleeved dress - shawl around waist
Colour	beige dress - purple cloth in front	white or beige	purple
Realm	human figure	human figure	human figure
Gender	female	female	female
Age Group	young woman	young woman	young woman
Social status	servant	elite or priestess	elite
Reference	painting	painting	painting
Posture	hunched over table	sitting upright	standing upright
Action	holding or lifting table	attending to her ritual activities	pouring liquid from jug onto plate
Objects			
Description		plate on table	jug
Reference		painting	painting
Realm		human	human
Function		receptacle for liquid being poured	pouring liquid onto plate

	TABLES OF SCENES			
Itemised de	Itemised description of figures and objects			TABLE 1
	Entrance scene			
Scene 1	Figure 1 Standing Woman	Figure 2 Standing child	Figure 3 Seated woman	Figure 4 Woman with Tray
Figures				
Hair	curled in front	loosely tied back	tied back away from face	tied back in bun - leaves in hair
Head	upright in line with body	tilted forward to read	tilted downwards - uncovered	tilted forward slightly - olive or laurel leaves
Face	looking slightly downwards	no emotion just reading	almost depressed - sad	no emotion
Gaze	serious or apprehensive	looking at text	looking past figure 1 as if not seen	looking at viewer
Neck	straight - covered in shawl	unseen - behind scroll	turned to side	leaning forward
Torso	upright - clothed	upright - naked - gold boots	relaxed - seated	upright clothed
Left arm	holding dress away from body	holding scroll	resting in lap holding scroll	holding tray with bread or cakes - bangle
Right arm	hand on hip - unusual pose	holding scroll	resting on shoulder of figure 2	holding twig or stick - bangle
Legs	covered - unseen	standing leaning on left leg	knees apart - relaxed	walking left leg forward
Feet	covered - unseen	short boots	crossed over - unseen	sandals
Clothing	cloak over head - double tunic	none	dress no sleeves - cloth over one shoulder	loose tunic - cloth around hips
Colour	beige shawl - white and lilac dress	n/a	beige dress - white cloth over	beige tunic - brown or purple cloth
Realm	human figure	human child - possible young god	human figure	human figure
Gender	female	male	female	female
Age Group	young woman	child	young woman	young woman
Social status	upper class	unknown	upper class	unknown
Reference	painting	painting	painting	painting
Posture	standing upright	standing upright relaxed	seated, relaxed.	walking forward
Action	standing still as if waiting for action	standing reading scroll	sitting listening seriously to reading	walking away from other figures
Objects				
Description		scroll	scroll	tray of cakes or bread - twig or stick
Reference		painting	painting	painting
Realm		mythological	human realm	human realm
Function		being read by child	being held by figure 3	being carried by figure 4

ADDENDUM 1



ADDENDUM 2

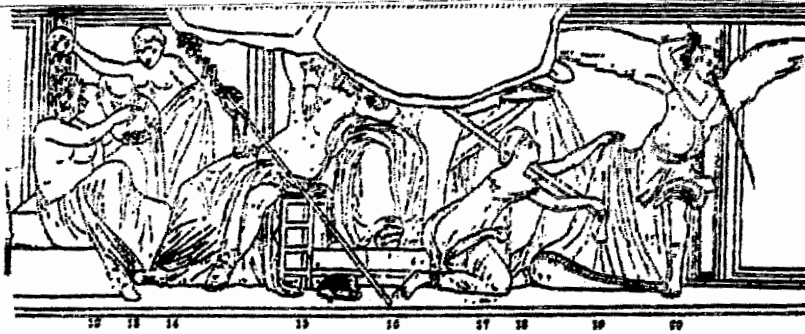
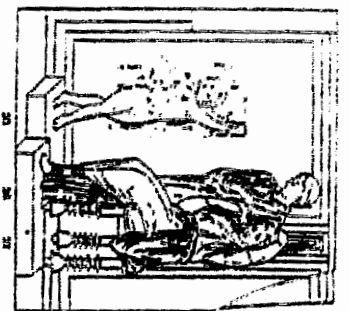
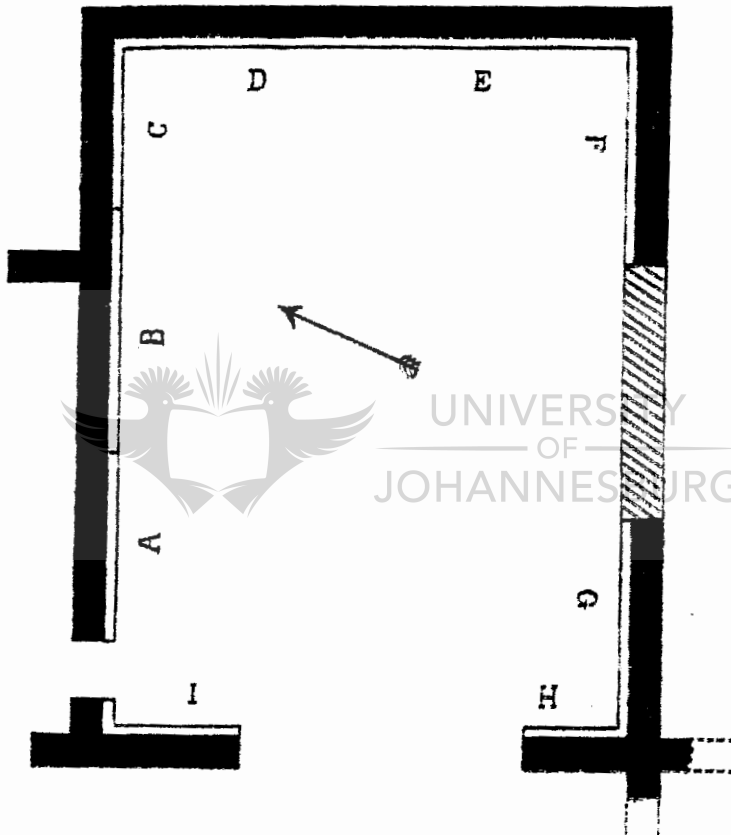


TAVOLA X.



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